

THE SECOND OMNIBUS BOOK

Containing three full-length Novels,
as well as Short Stories, Plays,
Parodies and Poems

by

J. B. PRIESTLEY
W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM
MAURICE BARING
ROBERT GRAVES
EDNA FERBER
J. C. SQUIRE
CHRISTOPHER BUSH
and
AUGUSTUS CARR

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EDITOR'S NOTE

A YEAR ago, when the First Omnibus Book was published, we felt it necessary to apologise for the disorder of its pagination. The readers of that volume, however, were so patient of its numerical eccentricities that this year we do not hesitate to use the same method of production—for in no other way can the price of the volume be kept as low as eight shillings and sixpence.

CONTENTS

J. B. PRIESTLEY

ADAM IN MOONSHINE—A Novel

W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

RED

THE OUTSTATION—Short Stories

MAURICE BARING

CATHERINE PARR

THE REHEARSAL

KING ALFRED AND THE NEAT-HERD—Plays

EDNA FERBER

MOTHER KNOWS BEST—A Story

J. C. SQUIRE

HOW THEY WOULD HAVE DONE IT—Parodies

ANONYMOUS

AUGUSTUS CARP, ESQ.—A Novel

CONTENTS

ROBERT GRAVES

POEMS:

PURE DEATH

THE COOL WEB

THE DEAD SHIP

THE LOST ACRES

THE AWKWARD GARDENER

THE PHILATELIST ROYAL

TO THE READER OVER MY SHOULDER

THE BEAST

THE TERRACED VALLEY

A SONG TO MAKE YOU AND ME LAUGH

CHRISTOPHER BUSH

THE PERFECT MURDER CASE—A Detective Novel



ADAM IN MOONSHINE

A Novel

by

J. B. PRIESTLEY

CHAPTER ONE

THE TRAVELLER

EVEN when he had bought his ticket, a first-class that he could hardly afford, in the leisurely fashion demanded by such an act of self-indulgence, and had loitered at the kiosks buying papers and a tin of tobacco, Adam Stewart discovered that he had still some twenty minutes or so left. Not that it mattered; they would soon pass. He found himself repeating, with the solemn relish of one who achieves nonsense, "Pancrastination is the thief of time." St. Pancras, surely the most canonical of all our stations, seemed to rebuke his levity. Indignant puffs of smoke and steam, sudden red glares of anger, ascended to the great arched roof. The locomotives grunted and wheezed like outraged sacristans. The thin high voices of the newsboys ran together into a protesting chorus of virgins and elders. But no, that was Greek drama, Adam reminded himself, and nothing to do with cathedrals, and it is with cathedrals that large railway stations must always be compared. He strolled towards his train, waiting there with a long perspective of open doors, and for a moment or so enjoyed the feeling of large and superior leisure that visits the traveller who has time to spare, and watched other and less fortunate passengers, scurrying here and there, dwindling into agitated pigmies before his calm gaze. But he found it impossible to enjoy anything else, although there were so many things he

ought to be enjoying. He ought to be hugging the promise of the coming journey, and the thought of the little holiday, tossed out of the blue, to which it was the rattling overture. He had always rapturously anticipated such things before—indeed, that had always been the best part of it—but this time nothing was happening.

There, where the great dim cave ended, was the blazing June sunshine, and beyond the few miles of hot bricks outside were the fields that would tear past him hour after hour, scribbling their zig-zag gold and white lines of buttercups and daisies. How excited he had been, years ago, about buttercups and daisies, when they had not formed a flat pattern but had stood out, enormous, magical! When and why had he lost that excitement? And then, he urged himself to remember, there would be at last the North-country hills and moors, lifting up their long clean edges; the huddling grey villages; the heather and the close springing turf that turned walking into dancing; and all the little streams that you could drink and drink. Mornings would be an enchanted affair of sun, mist, and dew, of bright hillsides with vast cloud shadows moving across them, of larks still happily crazed in Eden. And everywhere would be that tangling, salty kind of smell, in which fresh earth, heather, sea, sand, and wet grass were all marvellously commingled. He tried to recapture that smell, but there came to him only the bare scentless idea of it. Nor could he achieve that little hugging ecstasy of anticipation he should have felt, for something in him remained uncaught, and though he

conjured up fine phrases, heard himself describing it all enthusiastically, he was denied the glow of real enthusiasm. And now, as he entered an empty first-class smoker, there descended upon him a certain luxurious gloom.

After placing his bag on the rack and his papers and tin of tobacco in a corner seat, Adam turned to look at his reflection in the little mirror opposite. He tried for a moment to examine the dark young face peering out of the glass quite disinterestedly, as if it belonged to someone else, an effort that gave the face a peevish, strained look and its owner no pleasure. A quick turn of the head removed from his sight the straight black hair, the dark grey eyes, the longish nose, the mouth that contracted as he stared, the long pointed chin, all those features that he had carried with him and developed for four-and-twenty years, but that still remained rather strange and uncertain, as if a very sudden darting glance in the glass might take them by surprise and not give them time to assemble. His eye rested on the tin of tobacco he had placed on the seat, but for once there came no answering little thrill. Usually the sight of a half-pound tin of tobacco snugly awaiting his pleasure, brought with it a distinct, if tiny, thrill of its own. Adam smoked his pipes with fervour; he had been puffing away long enough now to enjoy the pipe itself, but at the same time he was still young enough, as a man and a smoker, to enjoy too the idea of a pipe, so that it wreathed him not only in a cloud of smoke but also in an atmosphere. He saw himself and enjoyed himself as a man with a pipe, mellow,

philosophical, wise. He filled and lighted one now, and as the first slow sweet puffs came dribbling through, he tried once more to whip up his interest in the forthcoming journey and the little lounging holiday that was waiting at the end of it.

Though he never cared to admit it, he really delighted in a long railway journey if it was passed in anything like comfort, particularly a journey at night, when it was rather like reading wild romances in bed, at once cosy and adventurous, for you lived in a tiny, lighted room that rattled and roared through leagues of darkness. But to-day the prospect was flat, perhaps because it was afternoon, and an idle June drowsy-till-tea afternoon at that. Certainly something was wrong. Perhaps he was getting too old to enjoy such thrills, boyish affairs at best. He caught an idiotic little voice at the back of his mind solemnly repeating "Nothing matters," and rather impatiently he flung himself into his corner seat. The train could start when it liked now, for all he cared, and he might as well settle down to read. By his side was *Punch*, which ever since his first year at Cambridge Adam had elaborately despised in public but frequently bought and examined in private. There were even moments when he was almost tempted to follow the example of his father, who in his careless middle-aged indifference to the finer points of social conduct would repeat the jokes. Then there was *The Community*, the weekly review he had bought at odd times lately, which in spite of its name was essentially a periodical for the very intelligent minority. Indeed, the contempt the paper had for all majorities was

THE TRAVELLER

only equalled by its delight at any slight rise in circulation. There were things about *The Community* that Adam, in his heart of hearts, did not like, for its writers were so loftily disdainful, so little inclined to enjoy anything or anybody, and suffered so terribly from the birth-pangs of their groaning composition, that it was a mystery why they should ever condescend to write at all. Yet they contrived somehow to flatter him: nowhere else could so strong a feeling of superiority be bought for sixpence.

There were only ten minutes or so left now and the train was rapidly filling up. Adam had no sooner begun to read than the door, which he had closed, was flung open, and he found the carriage that after five minutes' tenancy he had come to consider his own, invaded by the imposing figure of a large clerical gentleman, followed by a porter with bags. The assurance and commanding presence of this intruder only increased Adam's resentment. Everything about him, face, figure, manner, was in the high Roman fashion, and he addressed and finally dismissed the porter as if Plutarch himself were in sight and hearing. Adam promptly confounded him and his grand manner. Any company was a nuisance, but nothing could be worse than the company of a middle-aged parson, and a large, loud, autocratic one at that, who would fuss all the time, who would want the windows either all opened or all shut, and would inevitably get what he wanted. For a moment, in the black depths of his mind, Adam headed a riotous anti-clerical movement and saw himself doing dreadful things to chasubles,

whatever they might be. Meanwhile the gentleman himself, having long ago bid farewell to any childish delight in corners, had settled down squarely and firmly in one of the middle seats opposite, and was now looking at nothing in particular with intense disapproval.

Now that this cleric had removed his broad-brimmed hat, and there was plainly visible his large clean-shaven face, with its conquering legion of a nose in an excellent strategic position between two Germanic forests of eyebrow, Adam had a feeling that he had seen him before somewhere. That face, not easily to be mistaken for any other, was familiar. And then suddenly he remembered. This was no common cleric but no other than Canon Drewbridge, whose photograph he had seen many a time, a celebrity in his way, who was well-known as a contributor to the Press. Democracy, the Revolutionary Spirit, and all their attendant antics, had no more thorough and bitter opponent than the Canon, who was always called in by the more Conservative papers to give his opinion when anything unusual happened, and always decided that it was the very worst. It was said, too, that his sermons were not without interest. Adam, who had not yet made up his mind about everything, was neither a friend nor an enemy of Democracy or the Revolutionary Spirit, but it was impossible for him to regard such a figure as Canon Drewbridge with indifference. After all he had never travelled with such an important personage before, and now his resentment vanished, but only to give place to a slight feeling of appre-

hension. He felt as if at any moment he might have to undergo a *viva voce* examination. When the Canon taking up a book, suddenly cleared his throat, producing a startling sound not unlike the preliminary flourish of a Lewis gun, Adam nearly jumped from his seat and found himself wishing to apologise, to beg pardon for anything and everything, his presence there, his youth, his pipe, his blue tie.

A few minutes more and they, he and the Canon, would be wheezing through the sun-baked suburbs and then speeding North across miles of shining fields. But no, they were not to be alone, for once more the door was flung open and a porter appeared with two bags. Behind him was a thin, middle-aged man, with a clean-shaven face at once mild and rather fretful; a tweedy, flowing tie, straggling hair, soft-collar-attached-to-shirt kind of man, who looked to Adam like a rather unsuccessful water-colour artist. With him were three girls, and not ordinary girls, tall, short, fat, thin, giggling, severe, but creatures so radiant, so instantly adorable, that at the very sight of them the day turned on more lights, everything went up into a higher key, and Adam's heart gave one suffocating bound upwards to be in tune. He had not seen such girls, no, not for months, not for years, perhaps never before. One was fair, one was dark, and one was somewhere between, but one and all were an enchantment, their faces swimming in a gold mist. Were they coming, too? Adam had a fleeting vision of the carriage crammed with loveliness, bright eyes every-

where, of himself being witty and wise, of love and friendship and tremendous adventures with gold hair, grey eyes. Then it all splintered to nothing, for of course they were not coming, but were daughters and nieces and what-not seeing this fellow off. He had now closed the door and was talking to them through the open window.

Undoubtedly it was rude thus to look and listen his hardest, but Adam, all his hopes gone tobogganing, was determined to hold fast to the remaining minute or so. If these girls were going to allow themselves to be transformed into three waving handkerchiefs and then into nothing at all, idiotically staying behind and yet wickedly contriving to make everything that left them as flat as ditchwater, they must take the consequences, must submit to being stared at and overheard. One of them, the fair one, who had something foreign about her, met his glance with a faint flicker of interest in her eyes. The dark one encountered it gravely for a second, then looked indifferently away. The third, who was a little in front of the others and was busy talking up at the window, looked right through him, so that he longed to shout at her to let her know he was there, and not only there but very important and ready for all kinds of adventures. Meanwhile his ears were not idle. Though these girls were not coming with him, they were certainly going somewhere.

"You understand then," the talkative one, apparently his fellow-passenger's daughter, was saying, "you're to pick up Siddell at Lobley and then drive up. We shan't be more than two hours after you,

with luck." Young as she was, she was tremendously business-like, and her voice was very keen, incisive.

Her father sounded rather perturbed. "Yes, yes, I understand. But take care or you'll break your necks. And don't frighten your Aunt Muriel to death with mad driving, my dear."

Here the dark one, glimmering with amusement and with the loveliest suspicion of laughter in her voice, broke in. "How many of the ——"—and here she nodded—"did you get?"

"Thirty." And the man leaned forward and lowered his voice. "They nearly fill one of the bags."

His daughter frowned a little at this, but the dark girl glimmered again and cried softly, "Lovely, lovely! But thirty what? What do you call them? Pairs? Did you ask for thirty pairs? And are they all different?"

The other girl did not share her amusement and said impatiently: "I don't think it's at all funny, Helen. And I don't believe there's the slightest necessity for them. It's just like the Baron to wire like that, and I can just hear him chuckling to himself, the great fat creature. I don't believe he takes anything seriously; it's all a kind of game to him." And she glowed and looked like an indignant boy, and Adam, his head whirling with bags and pairs and Barons, adored her.

But before there was time for any reply to this outburst, doors were slammed and whistles blown, and there broke out a chorus of good-byes. The fair, foreign girl, who was addressed as Miss Ber-something-or-other, probably Russian, smiled brilliantly

and kissed her hand. The dark one, her eyes still dancing, seemed to cry something that sounded like "Good-bye, my dear companion of the rose!" if that were not too strange to be true. And then, with a final "Be careful, Peter," to his daughter, and a downward peck at her cheek, the man at the window waved them all off and sat down.

Adam felt quite annoyed with him for sitting down, for as soon as he had settled himself and the train had shrugged its way out into the hot afternoon, everything was changed; the world suddenly shrank, all beauty, mystery, glamour, gone out of it, vanished for ever. It was as if all that fine mysterious stuff about thirty pairs and Barons and companions of the rose had dwindled and faded into something remembered from an old book. They were simply there, the two of them, no, the three of them, for there was the Canon (and it was delightful to have forgotten the Canon, involuntarily to have waved him back to limbo), sitting there stupidly in a railway carriage that would probably become stuffier and stuffier. Nothing could ever happen in it, and nothing would ever happen when it was done with, nothing but the staring sun and the idle hills and white dusty roads. The train, with a kind of irony, began to gather speed, and soon London was left behind. Adam looked across at Peter's father, now buried in a book. Hatless now, a cigarette in his mouth, he still looked mild and rather fretful, and more like an unsuccessful water-colour painter than ever, so that Adam saw stretching out behind him an unsold stack of *Old Mills on the Cotswolds* and *Rocks on the*

Cornish Coast. There was no glamour in that figure. Yet it still held, as a room sometimes holds an echo of old music and laughter and the faint perfume of some vanished lady, the remembrance of such glamour. Indeed, somehow it held something more, the promise of adventure to come. But such promises, attenuated beyond any grasp of reason, Adam assured himself with a wise mournfulness that was not altogether unpleasant, were never redeemed on this side of Cloud-Cuckoodom.

He had thought once of opening a conversation, in which he might artfully lead the talk round to destinations and business and names and addresses. The thirty pairs and Siddell at Lobley and the Baron and Miss Ber-something and Peter and Helen might easily all come tumbling out of such a talk. Peter's father was clearly approachable, merely shy at the worst, and as they were sitting facing one another, an opening would not be difficult. But the Canon was there, still sitting massively and imperially in the middle, as if awaiting another Gibbon, and you could not imagine many secrets—and if these things were not secrets, they were nothing—creeping out under the nose of the Canon. Besides, even if the cross-examination were successful, it was not worth the trouble, for it only meant that his curiosity would be satisfied and it was something more than that he wanted. That would probably make everything as stale and flat as the railway carriages, the hurrying telegraph poles and undulating fields outside. What he did want he did not know. Impatiently he tossed aside his papers, walked out into the corridor, there

to lean against the rail that ran across the window, to watch the Midlands flying past, while his thoughts crept in and out of the drift of his tobacco smoke.

He felt despondent, curiously baffled. Spreading out the mental plan of his little holiday, he found it without fault. The train would drop him at Gloam Junction, and he could spend that night at Gloam a couple of miles away, where there was some sort of inn. Then, in the morning, when all that upland world would seem remade, all dew and fire, leaving his bag to be brought on by the carrier, he would walk over Gloam Moor and drop down into Runnersdale, which some people thought the loveliest dale in England. He had passed through it in a car a year ago, and had made up his mind to spend a holiday there when the first opportunity arrived. After crossing Gloam Moor, he could either stay at West Rudge, a fat little square of a village, or simply drink beer there and walk on to East Rudge, a rather larger village that boasted a good little inn. Then there would be a week's delicious lounging, lying flat on your back on High Moor or Dun Fell, with a glimpse or two from High Moor of Sillowdale, and ample measures of reading (he had brought *Harry Richmond* and *The Arrow of Gold* with him, and already itched to be hobnobbing again with Richmond Roy and Conrad's Captain fellow who was *Américain, catholique et gentilhomme*), of smoking, eating, drinking, and sleeping. It would be all just as he had planned it, brooding over the Ordnance Map at home. He would be alone, but then he had been alone before and, indeed, was inclined to prefer it, if

only because you could live excitedly inside all the time, throwing up turret after turret of dream, and know there was no fear of everything collapsing at a word and a grin. But now everything had collapsed already, gone flat and stale, and there seemed nothing to hug to oneself except the thought of two books, too good to be trifled with, yawned over, in a train. Nor was his mood now, as it had been earlier, one of luxurious gloom, in which there was a flattering touch of elderly satiety, but rather one of real despondency, a leaden sea of feeling through which there moved, with an occasional crimson and silver flash, fine mournful phrases like strange fish.

Those girls, just the sight of them and of the faint will-o'-the-wisps of their fantastic chatter, he knew, had added the last flattening touch. Yet it was not just simply being tantalized, the fact that they had been left behind, that he was out of it, that had made the difference. It was, more subtly and corrosively, the conviction that there was nothing really to be in, he reflected, and began to feel rather like one of Henry James's middle-aged Americans who seem to have no employment beyond an obscure and suffocating kind of self-torture. You could compare it with the feeling you had when you passed a house at night, and all the lights were on, fascinating shadows passing across the blinds and someone playing the piano, and as you stood for a moment, outcast in the darkness, looking and listening, you felt that there was something going on there more wonderful than anything you had ever known; and yet all the time you knew very well that if you were actually inside

that house there would be nothing very wonderful there at all and you would simply be mildly amused or even bored, all the glamour, the wizardry of its light and music coming through the night, vanishing. Life seemed determined that either you should see the enchantment of things but remain miserably outside, alien, lost, or that you should be inside, welcomed and snug, but compelled to suffer a speedy disenchantment, your apple eaten. Yet Adam, with the cup of wormwood in his hand, had still remaining with him a dim conviction that life was not really like that. Was it absolutely impossible to keep something of the outside view, the enchantment, and yet have the comfortable inside feeling as well? Was there a magic bridge, and if so, what was it? Was it love, as so many of the poets and novelists seemed to believe? So far, when his heart had been stirred, he had always been still faced with this outside-inside dilemma, but then, had he ever really been in love? He did not know, and there was nothing in the sight and sound of Leicester station, at which they had now arrived, to tell him. He returned to his compartment.

It was by no means the same place he had left, but altogether livelier, for things were happening there. The Canon and his fellow traveller, now flushed and noisy, had turned it into an arena, full of dust and smoke and clash of steel. They were deep in a large confused argument, each busy hurling his pet universe at the other's head. They were so engrossed that they merely looked up at Adam's entrance and then went on as before, and Adam did not even

make a pretence of reading but settled himself comfortably in his stall. The Canon was in his usual vein, and it was evident that he had already flung away at least a hundred guineas' worth of denunciation and solemn warning, even if it were estimated at ordinary newspaper rates of pay. And the Canon always received special rates, particularly when he was in his apocalyptic vein.

"I repeat, the only thing that can save us," he roared, towering and purple, "is more discipline in our public life, and more humility, Christian humility as the Church has always taught it, in our spiritual life. For want of both, we are rotting, sir, rotting." And he glared at his hearers as if only by the power of his eye he could arrest their imminent decomposition.

But he was not to be allowed to save the world by himself, for Peter's father, timid but gallant, was also bent on the task. "That's your view, and, believe me, I understand what you feel about it all. B-but—" he stammered, as he caught the Canon's eye—"I must tell you that I b-believe you're all wrong. Surely we've too much discipline and humility already. No, no, allow me, one moment. We're hag-ridden, afraid. The splendour of the individual, that's it, that's what we've to get back to. Pride, courage! Pride in ourselves! Courage to live in our own way!" And he waved his hand, apparently towards a group of cows that was rushing past the window. "To be masters of the world!"

"Masters of a dung-heap, sir! And none the less a dung-heap because we have lately fitted it with

wireless and other childish fiddle-faddles." Here the Canon flung out a forefinger as if to call up two or three more legions. "It is such doctrines that have brought us to the condition we are in now, a world rotten and seething with disaffection, revolt. Upstarts everywhere, and nobody knowing his own place, atheists to a man. Once you begin worshipping the world, this is what happens; you make it no longer fit to live in, not even for the three-score years we are crawling about in it. We need chastening, sir, chastening!"

"I grant you that. It's no longer fit to live in. But isn't it only because we've lost our old noble pride, our fine old loyalties, the very spirit of romance? No, we've not lost them, but they've buried away somewhere and they'll spring up at a touch when the moment comes. Everything can be changed, and may be changed sooner than you think."

"I've seen a good many changes," the Canon interrupted, "and they've all been for the worse, Jack becoming as good as his master and then thinking himself better. Heads in air and no backbone. Bad to worse, that is the sum total of all the modern movements, bad to worse!"

"But what we must have," his companion went on, "if you will kindly allow me to say so, is more pride in ourselves, more courage, more confidence. We must recapture, if I may say so without offence to one of your persuasion, that old fine carelessness, not mere recklessness, you must understand, but a confident belief in the great moments of this life——"

"A contrite heart," the Canon thundered away,

"is nothing but mere words now. And what is the result? Why——"

"Only in this way can we reach what we might call the fine flower of personality, a world adventurous, beautiful. But don't mistake me, for I can appreciate——"

"—— An outer discipline; every man knowing his place and keeping in it. An inward humility, a desire to learn, to be shown the way, to understand; a reverent belief——"

"—— A moment will come, perhaps it is at hand now, when a lead will be given, and if that fails——"

"—— Or else universal catastrophe. We have our choice."

"—— Lost indeed. But that can save the world."

And so the duet ended, suddenly, breathlessly, and Adam found himself no longer battling in a tide of sound, but high and dry on the shores of silence, a silence only broken by the monotonous churning of the train, which drowned the heavy breathing of the debaters and all the noises of that world which was running past them on its way to salvation or doom. And there crept into this quiet a quality of irony that made them all avoid one another's eyes. Perhaps it was to break this that Peter's father, as Adam now called him, remarked a trifle wearily: "But sometimes I despair of it all."

"I have despaired of it for years," the Canon rejoined heavily.

And Adam felt that he too despaired of it all, and wished he had the courage to say so. But whether the man who at that moment flung open the door

ADAM IN MOONSHINE

also despaired of it, they were never to know, for all that he said was "Take your seats now for the first dinner, gentlemen."

And all three of them, still without exchanging a glance, then departed to take their seats for the first dinner.

CHAPTER TWO

THE DISGUISES

IN the dining-car, Adam found himself separated from his two companions, who were given a little table on the opposite side. He was by himself, a lonely figure eating its way through five courses and across two counties. There is a certain pleasure, even for the sophisticated, in spooning soup and hacking a cutlet while a panorama of England is being swiftly unrolled at each side, in rushing through several hundred yards of space between one bite and the next. Adam could also enjoy the feeling known to everyone who dines in a train, that feeling of having cunningly killed time, of having cheated the journey out of one of its monotonous hours. But these were only fleeting pleasures and could not prevent the dinner from being a dull affair, distinctly an anti-climax after that world-saving in the carriage. Adam was so determined not to be taken in that his whole life seemed to be dedicated to hunting what he called "the snag," and he was always on the watch for anti-climaxes and always mournfully congratulated himself whenever he found one; yet there was still something left inside him that would not accept the situation, would not face the facts, and so was for ever feverishly hoping and for ever wailing its disappointment. By the time he had drained the last of his bottled beer—and bottled beer itself is something of an anti-climax, every succeeding

mouthful shedding brightness and savour—and was ready for coffee, his spirits had sunk to their former level and he told himself again that nothing could happen. He was still young enough to want something to happen, even immediately after dinner.

The only thing that was happening was that the tall man sitting by himself lower down the car was still staring; and there was obviously very little to be made out of that. It does not say much for the company present at dinner that the tall man should have excited most interest, for Adam had to confess that he was hardly a startling figure. The imagination could only recognize in him a mere make-shift. One feature alone claimed your attention, and that was his long shaven upper lip, a strangely unreal upper lip that seemed to be wincing at its own nudity and to be haunted by the ghost of a large moustache. For the rest, this was an erect, thinnish fellow who might be anything between forty-five and fifty-five, with short greying hair, bushy brows and a turned-down melancholy nose. He wore his clothes, very self-effacing garments, not as if he had bought them, but as if he had been entrusted with them for a few weeks. At one moment he suggested a commissionaire who had recently come into a small fortune, and at another he looked like a retired major who had taken to travelling in something unassuming and genteel. His present occupation, apart from the quiet and systematic disposal of his food, was staring. He stared at Adam, at the Canon, or at least at the back of the Canon's neck, and most of all he stared at Peter's father. There was no meaning to

be wrung out of his stares; he did not seem to be friendly, menacing, puzzled, even commonly inquisitive; he just blankly stared and stared. Adam began to wonder if he really saw anything at all, if he was not merely ruminant, engaged in nothing beyond chewing his cutlet. When the dinner was done, he sat on, neither smoking nor lounging but erect over his coffee. Now and then he would give a sharp glance out of the window, as if to make sure that the train was going in the right direction, but the remainder of the time he spent in gazing at his fellow travellers. When the Canon and Peter's father rose and departed, he stared them out of the car. Rising and departing after them, Adam left him still staring: he could feel the little eyes in the middle of his back.

He returned to the carriage to find there an easier and more friendly atmosphere. Peter's father, now puffing at a bent cherry-wood pipe that almost turned him back again into an art student, looked up and gave Adam a little grin of recognition. He also received a nod from the Canon, who had discovered somewhere in his wilderness an excellent cigar and was now at peace, looking as if at any moment he would produce *Deus nobis haec otia fecit* or something of that kind, for the enjoyment of the company. Adam could feel himself already screwing his face into that look of keen appreciation demanded by a mellow Virgilian tag. He responded at once to this new atmosphere. They had dined and were now being soothed by their tobacco; the shadows were lengthening outside; they were travellers nearing the

end of their journey and at peace together: here then was a ripe and friendly hour. Adam lounged in his corner and let his spirit expand and overflow. There was still some touch of melancholy, a faint mist of disillusion, in his inmost heart, but now this feeling only drew him closer to his companions, with whom he was ready to share secrets, to exchange wistful dreams, to conclude in mellow wisdom. Failing that, he was not averse to a little general conversation—even yet the Baron and the rest might be waiting in the wings, eager for the merest hint of a cue—and that, it was clear, might break out any moment. But for a while they smoked in silence, luxuriously watching, it would seem, the broken ice go floating, melting, away.

It was trumpery enough when it did begin, that conversation, nothing but little questions and answers, not much better than the dialogues in the phrase-books for foreign travellers, and yet, as Adam felt at the time and did not merely imagine afterwards, it was ringing up a curtain. Peter's father began it, and in a way began everything that happened afterwards, by enquiring what time they were due at Lobley.

Adam was vague and said so, vaguely; but the Canon, who was obviously the kind of man who stands no nonsense from trains, replied promptly: "Eight o'clock, sir." He took out a hunter, opened and shut it with decision, and went on: "We ought to be there in little more than a quarter of an hour, but we're several minutes late. Say ten past eight. You get out there, do you?"

THE DISGUISES

The other replied that he did. And to pick up Siddell, Adam added to himself, and could not help thinking that, when you came to look at it, there was something distinctly flattening about that picking up of Siddell. The thirty pairs and the Baron and the rose business would have to be uncommonly piquant to counterbalance Siddell.

"I know the town well," the Canon remarked, "but I've never liked the place. One of those industrial-agricultural hybrids that combine the stupidity and ignorance of your little country town with the dirt and vice of your industrial cities. Nothing to be done with such places. But perhaps I'm offending your civic pride."

"Not at all, not at all," came the reply. "I know nothing about the town, beyond the fact that it's very dirty. I'm merely getting out there to meet a friend, and then going on by car to the country, the dales."

"Then you're to be congratulated," exclaimed the Canon, "first because you are escaping Lobley, and, secondly, because you are going to the dales. Wonderful country, wonderful, perhaps the best we have left! Those high moors still keep out most of the vandals and vulgarians. I'm going there myself, to Sillowdale, an old retreat of mine. Is that your way?"

There is a compelling force about direct questions of this kind, so that if they are not immediately resisted by the mind they will drag out an answer, particularly when they have a Canon Drewbridge behind them. Adam could see that Peter's father

would have liked to have been evasive, but had not grappled with the situation in time. "No, that is, I think not," he stammered; "I'm not sure because I don't know the country well."

Onward marched the Romans, oblivious of barbarians shaking their fists in the undergrowth. "Ah! now I know it very well," pursued the Canon, who looked as if he had more than once divided it into three parts. "Perhaps I can tell you. Where is your destination?"

There was no help for it. The reply came: "Runnerdale."

Runnerdale! Adam wanted to break in with a round of applause. Would the Baron be there, waiting for his thirty pairs? And those three girls? They were going somewhere. And what was it that Peter had said? Something about not being two hours after him? Did that mean that they were all coming, only by car instead of rail? Was he going to be in it, after all? But what was "it"? Probably nothing but a fussy little house-party, and an hour's tennis and a cup of tea for him after the most feverish hanging around and angling. And yet—dear old Runnerdale!—who would go anywhere else! And for one happy second, he had a vision of it filled with laughter and all alight with merry eyes, gold hair, dark hair, among the heather; flowerlike faces lifted to the moon.

Meanwhile the Canon, having reached his objective, was almost equally triumphant. "Oh! Runnerdale. The very next dale, of course. You could hardly do better, though I have always thought

THE DISGUISES

myself that Sillowdale has the finer contours and is a shade the more bracing of the two. You will probably meet there an old acquaintance of mine, whom I haven't seen for years now, Baddeley-Fragge, Sir Arthur Baddeley-Fragge. A curious person, Baddeley-Fragge, an unsoundness somewhere there. One of those men of no perceptible mental weight who yet always seem to be unbalanced. But a gentleman, of course. Perhaps you know him already? "

The other admitted, with marked reserve, that he had met Sir Arthur Baddeley-Fragge, and was obviously disinclined for any further catechism. Partly to hide his unwillingness and partly because the train was nearing Lobley and the end of his journey, he began vaguely fussing with his things. The Canon, who realized that he had pushed his inquiries too hard and had no desire to relapse into an embarrassed silence, now turned to Adam.

"And is this your destination too, or do I have the pleasure of your company, so far your very silent company, a little further? "

"I get off at Gloam Junction." Adam's voice sounded queer and rusty to him after its long silence.

"Ah, yes. So you too are for my part of the world? " And the Canon looked for a moment as if he had made that part of the world.

Adam said, "Yes, Runnerdale," and at the same time looked to see what effect the announcement would have on Peter's father, now collecting his things. He was rewarded by a swift, and it seemed, either puzzled or startled glance.

No, he replied to the Canon, it was not absolutely his first visit, for he had spent a day motoring in the neighbourhood a year ago. The Canon was very patronising about this day.

"You may really say that you have not seen the country," remarked that dignitary, gravely, justly, and quite insufferably, "for a day of that kind gives you nothing. You must explore on foot, see it in this light and then in that light, in all its varying moods. Strange as it may sound, it has its surprises even for those who know it well. But then perhaps there is nothing strange to you in that. Life itself to you at your age, I imagine, is still infinitely surprising, with something to astonish round every corner. Later you will arrive at our view"—and here he waved his hand towards his contemporary, still fussing with his bags—"and find that all the surprises are gone and that everything may be safely anticipated. You will discover that life keeps to a programme."

This was precisely the view that Adam flattered himself he had held for some time, but he was by no means ready to accept it from the Canon. It is one thing to arrive at quiet disillusion by yourself, and quite another thing to have it thrust upon you, to see a strange hand brush the rainbow from the sky. So he answered, lightly: 'I've no doubt that life does work to a programme, sir. But is the programme on sale? I shouldn't be surprised if I were considerably astonished a great many times these next twelve months.'

"You wouldn't be surprised, eh? Well, at least you would be agreeing with me in that," said the

Canon, apparently unaware of the Alice-in-Wonderland turn the conversation had taken. "For my own part, I feel that I know now how things go. I do not expect to be surprised and should not be pleased if I were." Which was distinctly selfish of him, for as he always expected the worst to happen, any surprise would be a gain to the world.

There followed a short silence. Adam looked out of the window and saw the slate roofs and mean streets of Loblely that waited for dusk and some fleeting touch of dignity. Peter's father was now standing facing his luggage-rack and apparently engaged in putting away a book.

"You are not, by any chance, a member of the Murchison family down at Stott in Runnerdale?" inquired the Canon. "I seem to see a family likeness."

"No," said Adam firmly, "my name is Stewart."

The name was no sooner out of his mouth than things happened, frantically. Peter's father gave a start, turned round, crying involuntarily, "Why, then!" but had time to say no more for the train, too, gave a start, lurching as it turned into the station, and the next moment the contents of the bag he had opened on the rack came flying out. It was a sudden crazy shower of black, brown, grey and golden hair. Whiskers! False whiskers! Moustaches, beards, side-whiskers, scattering all over the seat and the floor. One rakish golden-brown beard went sliding slowly over the Canon's knee. Adam felt his heart bursting into an ecstatic doxology. Thirty Pairs!

And then all was chaos: the Canon still staring speechless, feebly waving beards away from his knee; and Peter's father, crimson, agitated, muttering something inaudible and cramming false whiskers into his bag; the train at a standstill and porters shouting "Lobley, Lobley"; and everything mixed into one glorious rich pudding of the commonplace and the preposterous. With one final backward glance, the owner of the whiskers, having more or less hived them at last, tumbled rather than stepped out of the train, bags in hand, shot himself into the mass of porters, luggage barrows, passengers, newsboys, refreshment wagons, and was soon lost to sight. Adam's eye followed him as it might have followed a meteor. The Canon, now an imperial hue, stood up and faced the station as if it swarmed with Goths and he was the last centurion. The door, still open, was one vast gaping grin.

No other passengers came to join them. It was unthinkable that anyone should, for obviously they must play it out there alone. And Adam, as if to put together his thoughts, closed the door and settled back into his seat. Undoubtedly something had gone, some brightness fallen from the air, with the departure of Peter's magnificent father, but now, Adam felt, he could afford to let him go, for surely they were all to meet again; the game, whatever it was, was afoot, and he was in it, tremendously in it. For the moment he simply hugged the whole thing to himself. There would be time enough to think it all out, to read all the little signposts and try one path and then another, on the way up to Gloam

Junction. And Peter's father would be picking up Siddell and hurrying on by car to Runnerdale, and the Baron would be waiting for his thirty pairs, and Helen and Peter and the rest, flushed and starry-eyed, would be streaking north for Runnerdale in moonlight, while he tried to think it out on the way to Gloam Junction. He saw the miles and minutes budding fatly, bursting with promise.

Meanwhile the Canon had resumed his seat and, as one just emerging from an ocean, had taken a deep breath, blown out his cheeks, and was now finding some obscure satisfaction in letting the air escape noisily. As if in answer to this signal, whistles had been blown, flags waved, and once more the train was moving on. It would not stop again before it reached their destination.

The Canon sat erect and looked grave, having visibly shed his previous character of persistent and patronising old friend of the district. He looked as if he were taking up his familiar stand in the wilderness; his was once more an ancestral voice; and there was a weary omniscience in his eyes as he fixed them upon his companion. He held up a forefinger.

"I knew it, I knew it almost from the first," he said gravely. "You probably overheard something of our discussion before dinner. You heard the pernicious stuff that man was talking. Perhaps you said to yourself that it is no great matter if doctrines of that kind should be advocated in an idle talk in a railway-carriage, that it proves nothing. Believe me, it proves a great deal. I knew something was wrong, that that man, whatever his errand might be, was

up to no good. The country, as you must know, is rotten with intrigue, disaffection, lawlessness. It stinks with revolutionaries of all kinds, men whose business it is to create disorder, to flout the recognized authorities, plotting and planning here, there and everywhere to turn the established order upside down. That man is one of them. You saw for yourself."

"You mean the false whiskers?" Adam put in, feeling that the Canon was reluctant to pronounce the words.

"Disguises! A bagful of disguises!" the Canon resumed with an air of sombre triumph. "I believe he tried to mutter something about amateur theatricals, but the situation was so plain that even his impudence could not carry it off. And he knew very well that I suspected him. You must have noticed his secretive manner. It may, of course, be ordinary crime; he may be a member of one of those powerful international gangs of criminals that we hear so much about now. But I hardly think so. There was nothing about the man to suggest the confident and dexterous criminal. He was clumsy; he was agitated. No, he represents something more menacing to society than ordinary theft and the like, he represents political disorder, social upheaval, those dark forces that are going to put an end to this Fool's Paradise of a democracy we have been trying to live in, with its clap-trap about universal education, gradual awakening of the masses, and what not. Something has begun already, probably with Russia behind it."

"You think, then——" Adam began.

" I think this "—and the Canon held up his hand again, and then waved it towards the remote and golden hills outside. " I think for an enterprise of this kind, plotting, meeting at all hours, collecting arms, you need a centre, preferably a place miles from anywhere. And the centre is here." And he waved again towards the hills.

Adam looked at them, then at the Canon, and frowned and nodded. He was genuinely thrilled, for the Canon did it uncommonly well, and there might, of course, be something in what he said, a real tearing animal for once behind his wolf cry. And then, as the Canon's eyes were still fixed upon him and he had a sudden desire to giggle, he looked away, looked towards the corridor, and started at what he saw there. The tall man he had seen in the dining-car, the man with the haunted upper lip and the stare, was outside there, and he was staring yet. He was, in fact, staring through the window at them.

" Hello! " Adam cried, for he was really startled. " What does that fellow want? "

The Canon looked and stiffened. " Probably another of them." And he set his lip and hurled defiance through the glass.

To this the tall man's reply, greatly to their astonishment, was quietly and slowly to open the door and enter the compartment. For a moment he stood there, eyeing them with an air of melancholy benevolence, and then in a deep and almost tearful voice, he asked if there had not been another gentleman in the carriage, and if so, what had become of this gentleman?

"He got out at the last station, Lobley," the Canon replied, very stiffly.

"Ah! I thought as much," said the newcomer, slowly sitting down, placing his hands on his knees, looking from one to the other and finally fixing his gaze upon the Canon. "Now, unless I'm very much mistaken," he continued, still staring, "you're Canon Drewbridge. You see I know you though you probably don't know me. You have to do your work in what we might call a powerful illumination, but I have to do mine in the dark. Personal pride, Canon, asks for public recognition, but duty, you might say, demands a state of beneficial anonymity. There's a strain there, particularly as I'm a family man, and any light that fell on me would be shared among many, but duty comes first. But there's no reason against telling you that my name's Hake, Inspector Hake, of a certain branch of the C.I.D. And there's no necessity for me to remind a patriotic and public-spirited gentleman like yourself that I can call upon you to give me all the assistance in your power."

Evidently feeling that he had made something like a speech, the Inspector relapsed into a sad silence for a moment. The Canon threw a triumphant glance at Adam, whose knees were tightening as if they felt the plot already thickening round them. The Canon was opening his mouth to speak, when the Inspector suddenly went on: "Now, no doubt you've all been talking together on the way down; you may have noticed one or two things, heard one or two things, that might be useful to me, as I happen to be interested in that gentleman for the moment."

The Canon needed no further invitation but plunged at once into a history of what had occurred during the journey, the sinister facts being supported by a full chorus of his suspicions. He said nothing, however, about the girls at St. Pancras and, if he had ever noticed their existence, would appear now to have forgotten them. For him their faces had blazed in vain. Adam could not help feeling a pitying contempt for a person in such a state of brutish insensibility, but at the same time he was curiously relieved to find that the girls were to be left out, and was resolved to be silent himself on that subject. Indeed, there was a moment when he suddenly hated the two of them talking there, with their nods and frowns and their great black lumpish figures; when he saw them as Hagens sharpening the spear for bright Siegfried, heard their voices banishing something gay and lovely from the world. It came and went in a flash, this odd perfervid vision, and the moment it was gone it seemed to him like a sudden thrusting of cloak and sword into the middle of a farce, yet it disposed of his neutrality for ever and he found himself swearing allegiance to an unknown and hardly credible Baron.

The Canon had now come to the very climax of his tale, having arrived at the bag and the things it so wildly scattered. "Here is one of them," he cried, and, inevitably with the air of a conjurer, he produced from somewhere behind him, to Adam's delight, that same golden-brown beard which had once crept like a trail of fire along his left leg.

Mr. Hake was much impressed and stretched out

his hand for the beard, which he turned over and over and seemed to regard almost lovingly. There was a little glint in his eye, and Adam could have sworn that he was struggling with a desire to try on the beard and take a look at himself in the glass. But he merely remarked, "I'll keep this," and carefully folded it up and put it in his pocket.

"Well, Inspector," the Canon said, heartily, "what do you make of it? Disguises, eh?"

"You might say so, you might say so," the other replied, at once reserved and judicial. "And going to Runnerdale? Well, I was going to run an eye over that part of the world myself, which shows you there's still prognostication in the service. There isn't much we overlook, Canon, whatever they may allege in the papers. But I must say I didn't anticipate the beards, not yet, that is. I thought it rather too early for beards."

"Quite so," the Canon agreed, rather vaguely. "And now perhaps you can tell us what it all means?"

"Why, no, I can't do that." And Mr. Hake shook his head mournfully. "I can't do that because, you see, so far it doesn't mean anything, that is, not to anybody but us. These things don't mean anything to you—and I'm regarding you now, Canon, as a member of the public—until, so to speak, they come up to the surface. And most of them don't come up to the surface. We see to that, in what you might call the subterranean department. It's usually a case of just running an eye over things and dropping a word here and there, and perhaps seeing one or two people to the railway station and the nearest port.

Intelligent anticipation, that's our business. And there's the whole thing in a nutshell."

The Canon seemed to have a difficulty in extracting a satisfactory kernel from this nutshell. "Well, Inspector, you have your orders, I suppose, and must keep your own counsel. And I have my suspicions, and, as a matter of fact, was just outlining them to this young—to Mr.—er—Stevens—here—"

"Stewart," Adam interposed sharply. People who were vague about his name annoyed him. And then he wondered if anything would happen this time.

It did. The Inspector, cutting off the flow of the Canon's speech with a little movement of his hand, suddenly concentrated his attention upon Adam. "Mr. Stewart, eh?" he said, musingly. "And how far might you be going, Mr. Stewart? Up to Scotland?"

Adam hesitated for a moment, feeling an absurd reluctance to mention his destination, but before he had time to speak, the Canon had cut in smoothly with "Runnerdale, I think you said?"

Mr. Hake looked for a moment as if he were going to whistle, but then merely remarked in his curious deep melancholy voice: "Ah, Runnerdale. And how do you propose to get there?"

Adam found his voice. "I propose to get out at the next station, Gloam Junction, and walk over in the morning." He had a most infantile desire to put out his tongue at the pair of them. The Inspector's elaborate Pawn to K4 manner was particularly irritating and made him wish he had a bag crammed with disguises and incriminating documents.

But all the Inspector said was, "I propose to get out there myself, and we're nearly there now." And he rose to his feet. "I've a subordinate of mine and some bags somewhere on this train to be collected. I shall see you later, gentlemen." The gentlemen watched his long straight back pass through the door and disappear into the corridor.

The Canon, too, stood up stiffly, and after remarking "A smart man, that," said no more but busied himself with his impedimenta, his arched nose reviewing bags, coats and sticks like a proud little general sitting well back on his horse. Adam followed his example, and, to the accompaniment of a steady hum of questions at the back of his mind, put together his things, which now he regarded not with the traveller's solid pleasure in the contents of his pack but with a faint contempt. Already they seemed to belong to a life long outgrown; the fellow who had packed that bag not twelve hours ago had shrunk to a mere slough, and his possessions had dwindled and faded with him and were now things unworthy of the rich giant tightening a strap round them. But that giant himself was shivering, perhaps from sitting so long, and now and again his heart would give a leap and a hollowness would make itself felt somewhere in the pit of his stomach, as if the pistol were about to crack for a great race. All the time unanswerable questions buzzed about him like flies.

The train began to slacken speed, and Adam, suddenly impatient to leave it, looked out of the window. There, curving towards him, was the tiny

THE DISGUISES

station, wedged in a depression among the fells and dominated by them, yet having the air of being itself a kind of summit, clean, remote, a high target that this monstrous arrow, launched out of the hot London afternoon, ages ago, was about to strike and perhaps in its thundering impact to destroy. And no sooner had its platform steadied itself than Adam without a "By your leave" to the Canon, burst from his box, still a small parcel of that hot London afternoon, into the cool upland air.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PUZZLED PRISONER

THE moment Adam stepped out on to the platform and stood there in immeasurable space, the carriage he had left behind lost its reality, and everything that had happened there, everything he had thought there, wore a look of the preposterous. It was as if he had pushed open the pit door, the clapping and the flat din of the orchestra dying away behind him, and had found himself under the stars. He charged his lungs almost to bursting-point with the keen moorland air, in which there seemed to come through the smokiness he had brought with him the mingled scents of hay and honeysuckle and a clover-laden breath. With all that he had acquired during the journey withering in that air, he returned with a rush to be the man he was before, who had packed that bag beside him, who had followed with his finger on the ordnance map the tracks across these moors, now shadowy on one side and on the other lightly dusted with gold. The valley was fast emptying itself of sunlight, sinking into a green dusk and sleep, but above, the great lines of the fells and the pale washed sky behind them set his spirit expanding. The simple enthusiasm he had tried in vain to recapture at the beginning of the journey now really returned to him. At the thought of his recent discontents, his rejection of the blessedness of merely holidaying here, his desire to be "in" something or

other, to be important to all manner of odd people, there visited him now a curious feeling of shame. He felt hang-dog, a renegade, before the grave pure face of this countryside. The Canon, fussing with a porter not three yards away, now seemed a figure from an old intrigue. The rest of them were characters from forgotten plays, moons in daylight. He brushed off his mind any cobweb thoughts of them and their affairs, grasped his bag firmly and stood there, a solid body of a pedestrian, regarding for a moment the distant hills. They flung him large promises, of escape and freedom, of healthful simplicities, of hours like ripe apples.

A tap on the shoulder turned him round. It was Inspector Hake. The train and everything in it might seem preposterous now, but their unreality had had no power to steal away the Inspector, to make a phantom of him, for he stood there more himself than ever, and complete now with bags and subordinate. As if confessing their defeat, the hills dwindled and receded.

"Now, Mr. Stewart"—the tone was essentially that of one gentleman to another—"I want to introduce to you my subordinate, who's going to look round with me, Sergeant Rundle. This is Mr. Stewart,"—and he turned to his companion, a beefy, comfortable fellow whose face wore the surviving twin of that large moustache which haunted Hake's upper lip, and whose plain clothes were a mere mockery, as if the Force had suddenly taken to flaunting its uniform. There was about the Sergeant, in addition to his pleasantly bovine look, a kind of

oddness, a vague appearance of thought struggling with masses of bullish tissue, that suggested that at the right time and place he might be amusing; but Adam could not for the life of him see why at that moment he should be called upon to make his acquaintance.

After looking at them both, gravely but without hostility, the Inspector went on: "I thought I'd better make you and Sergeant Rundle known to each other, Mr. Stewart, because, you see, you're coming along to the village with us for a little chat. Get that car, Sergeant, and have the bags put in."

Adam was astonished. What was the Inspector after? Was he being asked to share a drink, and was this the heavy police manner of suggesting it, or was he being arrested in the neat one-gentleman-to-another fashion that he seemed to remember in various knowing works of fiction? There was nothing in the Inspector's face to tell him, and the Sergeant had departed to commandeer the car. All he could do was to steer a middle course until he knew whether he was a guest or a prisoner.

"You're not—what is it?—taking me into custody?" he asked lightly, being merely facetious as a prospective guest, or coolly polite, adequate in the best tradition, as a possible criminal.

"Now, Mr. Stewart." And the Inspector repeated his name, which he seemed to like, as if he were reproaching a schoolboy for a piece of crude translation. "You're just coming along with me, to the place where you want to go, mark you, for I heard you say so, so that we can have a quiet little chat together. No harm in that."

"Not a bit," said Adam, now the prisoner. "But isn't it rather ridiculous? I've nothing to tell you, you know. And if you've any questions to ask, why not ask them here?"

Mr. Hake looked pained at this. "Because it wouldn't do. It's not our way. How do I know who's lurking about here? This is a delicate business, as you must know yourself, and—well, it might break here with all the trains about, and the porters, and the old Fords there. And here we are!"

This last exclamation greeted the return of Sergeant Rundle, who still looked vaguely ruminant but had, too, the air of one who has just contrived to make, from the most sketchy materials, a motor-car that would take them and their bags to the village. Adam found himself quietly shepherded outside the station and into this car, a roomy but very tattered vehicle.

"Now, what's the name of the hotel there up at the village?" asked the Inspector of the driver.

"That'll be 'T'Sun'."

"'Tsun,' eh!" said the Inspector, as if delightedly making himself believe that the North-country pronunciation made a kind of Russian word out of it. "Well, just you drive us to 'The Sun'."

And off they went, the Sergeant in front, Adam and the Inspector at the back, rattling over the dusty uneven little road, leaving the Canon, who had just entered the only other waiting car, staring behind them. Conversation in such a car could be nothing but a series of bellowings, so Adam did not attempt it, but tried to marshal his thoughts, which

seemed to be as badly jolted as his body. But there came with the rush of air, the dust and clatter, the flowing fields and grey walls, the approaching blue magic of the hills, a spark of exhilaration that was quickly fanned into a little blaze. The mood of the train, when the possible adventure was everything, and the mood of the station, when sky and hills made all possible adventures look tawdry, now melted into one another and poured into his spirit happy confidence. He was back in the adventure, head over heels back in it, but he was also rushing towards the hills and loving them. As for his present position, it was simply part of the "curiouser and curiouser," and for the moment he had the satisfaction of mingling two gaities, the inner clear one of the innocent and the outward desperate one of the criminal. It is true that he wore, quite involuntarily wore, the slightly outraged air of a citizen wronged by one of his officers, and willy-nilly there crept into his voice an injured tone; but all that was purely mechanical, part of the social hocus-pocus, and the real Adam Stewart, wondering and peering and capering underneath, it left untouched.

They cluttered through Gloam, perched on the edge of its dark moor, a grey little place for ever filled with the noise of running water, and finally reached "The Sun," which was on the far side of the village, on the moorland road. Clearly this was not a night when trade was brisk at "The Sun," for though the door was hospitably open, there came no buzz of talk, no laughing nor singing, no sound of

pots being hammered on the tables. The place seemed deserted. As soon as the car stopped, Inspector Hake, with surprising alacrity, hopped out and vanished through the inn doorway, the other two remaining in the car. After a minute or two, the Inspector returned and with him the landlord he had obviously been interviewing, a bullet-headed fellow, red as a brick and with the tiniest button of a nose. Whatever the landlord may have been told, he was evidently impressed and regarded the Inspector and the Sergeant with respect, and Adam, who had begun to feel something of a desperate fellow, with marked curiosity. He led the way into an empty room to the right, with a large window looking out on to the road, and into this room all their bags were taken. Then he disappeared for a moment and returned with a lighted lamp, which he placed on the table, looking inquiringly at the Inspector.

"What about that window?" asked the Inspector, pointing to the glass, now a dark sullen square destitute of curtain or blind.

"Ah've nowt fer that, just nah," muttered brick-face, "but an old pair o' shutters that 'ud tak quarter of an hahr ter fix up."

"Many people go past there?" And the Inspector jerked his thumb in the direction of the road outside.

"Not at this time o' neet. Or at onnytime. There's nobbut two or three live o' this side, 'tween here an' Runnerdale, and they'll be i' bed belike. Sometimes a motter-car or two, but if there should be one, 'e'll be that busy speeding up for t'hill that 'e'll niver

notice there's a winder 'ere let alone look through it." The landlord concluded his speech by rubbing the back of his neck very hard, as if to prepare himself for further and even more extravagant efforts.

"You've got a telephone, of course?"

"Not 'ere, Mister."

"Why, confound it!" exclaimed Mr. Hake.

"Surely there's one somewhere in the village?"

"Nay, yer've come away from t'only phone rahnd i' these parts," replied the landlord, with evident relish. "Phone's back at t'station."

"Damned nuisance! But look here, keep that driver here for a time, if he hasn't gone. I haven't heard him go."

"What, Sam, that fetched yer in t'car! 'E's not gone. 'E'll be in t'back 'aving a pint."

"Well, ask Sam to continue with his pint—the same pint, understand, and not a multitude of pints—for a few minutes, until I see if I shall want him."

"And talking of pints," Adam put in, as the landlord turned to go, "what about a drink? Good of the house, you know." He did not see why this conference should be dry as well as being solemnly ridiculous, and if the Inspec or did not like it, he could lump it.

But the Inspector had no intention of lumping it. Seeing that it was put that way, he had no objection to a small Scotch and soda. A voice, somewhere entombed in the Sergeant, suggested that beer should be poured down on it, and Adam himself was all for beer. The landlord departed. Adam, lounging in an old easy-chair, filled and lighted his pipe and looked

about him. Sergeant Rundle, a massive bulk on an old leather couch against the wall, after a glance at his superior officer, followed with his pipe. The Inspector sat erect on a hard wooden chair that looked as if it had been made for him. The room was of the kind Adam knew so well: the very sight of its low ceiling, the heather in the grate, the china dogs, the photograph of the prize ram, and the smell of it, that curious mixed smell of hay and whitewash and fowlhouses and beer, made him think of innumerable country days, of ham and eggs and enormous cups of tea and weary limbs trailing underneath the table. Happy foolish rooms! And here he was, in one of them, a suspect entertaining Scotland Yard, he reminded himself as he paid the landlord for the drinks; and the delightful oddness of it all suddenly drew him towards his companions, now nodding to him over their raised glasses.

"Don't you smoke, Inspector?" he remarked, as he and the Sergeant puffed away. "I should have thought that briars à la Sherlock Holmes would have been almost compulsory in your service."

"That's the popular idea, Mr. Stewart," said the Inspector solemnly, "and like many popular ideas, there's nothing in it. I used to smoke a good deal at one time, and even now I like an occasional cigar—a good cigar, and I flatter myself I know a good cigar. But I've practically given it up. You might think you'd want to smoke all day in my kind of work, travelling here and there, looking round, hanging about. But no, it doesn't do. It's too soothing; it blurs the problem, Mr. Stewart, blurs the problem."

It's meditative, you might say, and I'm naturally a meditative man, like the Sergeant here, but I'm also a man of feeling, and tobacco is too feelingly meditative. It tempts you to loiter by the wayside—if you see what I mean—in the mind, of course, and then before you know where you are—pop!—you've missed something, lost sight of somebody, and you don't know how you stand." And the Inspector drained his glass very quickly, set it down with a rap as if to mark a period, looked at Adam and said in a more brisk and impersonal tone: "But we're not getting any further. I'm all for being all friendly and comfortable, but what I want to know is"—and then quite sharply—"exactly who you are and what you're doing here. And I want the truth, mind!"

Adam felt quite easy, having nothing to conceal. "That's soon answered. My name is Adam Langland Stewart, and I live at The Firs, Weston Green, Surrey. And I'm here for a little holiday, a week or perhaps ten days, which I'm going to spend in Runnerdale. And that's all." But it all came out so glibly, so like a speech long practised for such an emergency, that Adam himself thought it sounded rather false and felt sure that he looked as if he were lying.

The Inspector stared on. "That's all, eh! And who might your father be, Mr. Stewart? And what do you do?"

"My father is John Stewart, managing director of Briggs, Stewart and Company, Limited, which owns the Briggs, Stewart and Blue Cross Shipping Lines, and whose head office is in King William

Street. And for the last eighteen months I have been working in that office, under my father, and there I intend to stay until the Red Guards or whoever intend to upset us all, turn me out."

Mr. Hake and his subordinate looked across at one another and each gave a little nod, perhaps to confirm the existence of such a company and such offices. Adam had a strong desire to laugh in their owlsh faces.

"And you're here for a little holiday, eh? Beauties of Nature instead of King William Street. Where are you going to stay?"

"I intended staying here to-night," Adam replied, "and then moving on to Runnerdale tomorrow. I shall put up at village pubs as I don't know anyone here."

"You don't know anybody?"

"Not a soul."

"What about Mr. Geoffrey Templelake, our friend with the bag in the train?"

So that was the name of Peter's father, Templelake. Odd name! "Never set eyes on him before," said Adam. "That's obvious. If you can tell me why he seemed so startled when he heard my name, I shall be much obliged to you. It's all a mystery to me."

"If it is, so much the better," the Inspector retorted. "Keep out of mysteries, that's my advice. Plain sailing's the thing, particularly for a young gentleman like yourself, in the shipping business. Stick to the shipping business and the beauties of wild Nature. And now, I'll have to do some tele-

phoning about this, back at the station, and you'll wait here with Sergeant Rundle until I come back, and then we'll decide what's to be done. A quiet hour with Rundle here will do you no harm; it'll compose your mind, put you in tune with the wonderland of Nature, as you might say."

He rose and moved towards the door, where the Sergeant joined him to confer in whispers for a minute or so. Then the Inspector went out, and a few moments later the car outside was restarted and they heard it rattle away into the night. A certain cosiness descended upon the two left behind. The Sergeant settled himself again on the couch, finished his beer with a smack, relit his pipe, and looked solemnly across at Adam, who was making himself comfortable and examining his companion and warder.

Signs of active cerebration soon began to wrinkle the Sergeant's large face, and finally he spoke. "Now, you're not going to be any trouble, not if you're a right-thinking young gentleman, as you seem to be. You've too much sense. You see how it stands. If you're what you say you are, well then, here you are then, where you want to be, not a bit out of your way. And if you're not, if you're what me and the Inspector took you to be, for reasons, mark you, for good reasons, then you're being kept out of mischief, stopped before there's no harm done. And, mind you, if you're not what we think you are, then"—and he wagged his pipe impressively—"talk about co-hincidences, there never was such a co-hincidence, never."

There was promise in the Sergeant. "But who am I supposed to be?" Adam asked. "And what's it all about?"

These questions turned Rundle into a large-moustached Laocoon. "Well, either you're one or the other," he began, cautiously, "and you know best who you are, either way——"

"Yes, but——" Adam broke in.

"But assooming," continued the Sergeant, doggedly, "that you're not what we think you are, and want to know who we do think you are, you've a right to ask, no doubt, but no right to be answered, and it wouldn't make any difference if you were, not any real difference. Put it this way, now, that either one or other, you're nothing as you stand now, nothing that is to us, but in one case, supposing you're the man we're after, you might turn into something and we've got to look after that. It's always the same with this sort of political business, not like crime, ordinary crime, that is, for you might call this a kind of crime, in the sight of the lor if not in the sight of private parties. Crime's easy, but this kind o' thing's very muddling."

"It's becoming more and more muddling to me," Adam retorted.

"No doubt, no doubt," replied the Sergeant, very complacently. "It all depends on how it's looked at. You've got to take an all-round view, you've got to put things together. It's just like life, and that's why a man that's known the service—and one that likes to think it all out quiet-like, for some of 'em won't think—knows a lot about life. It's all a mosaic,

that's what it is, a mosaic"—and then, in answer to Adam's stare—"You know what I mean, coloured bits all put together. Well, you've got your bit, and he's got his bit, and I've got mine, but a right-thinking man, looking it all over, can put 'em together. And that's what I've learned from the service, to put 'em together and walk away, in a manner of speaking, and then turn round and take a look at the mosaic." And he took out a large coloured handkerchief and mopped his brow, perspiring from the attempt to interpret his philosophy.

"Let's have another drink," the disciple remarked, and looked round for a bell. The Sergeant, bringing up some observation about "a friendly glass between man and man" from the depths, also looked round for a bell. There was none to be seen.

"I'll get them myself," Adam began, and then realized, as the other made an uneasy movement, that the Sergeant would not let him go nor be able to go himself; so he added lightly: "No, we'll both go round to the bar, each with his own glass. The walk, Sergeant, will do us good." Undoubtedly it was the fine aristocratic thing thus to gloss the relation between them, even though it meant fetching one's beer, and at that moment Adam was seeing himself as a fine aristocratic fellow at once mysterious and debonair.

So they sauntered out, glass in hand, found another door facing their own across the hall, opened it to discover a deserted smoke-room that had a portion of the lighted bar running across its far corner. There were sounds, too, from the tap-room at the other

side of the bar. Here their glasses were filled, and Adam, after paying for the drinks, led the way back to their own room. Once more they settled themselves, lit their pipes and nodded to one another over their glasses in the cosy lamplight.

Most of the talk came from Rundle, in whom the propitious hour seemed to have awakened a philosophic mood whose utterance struggled up through his flesh and wound round the vast obstacles set up by his manner of expression and finally emerged battered, exhausted. He was for ever laboriously preparing the way for some clinching judgment that never arrived. All the time he was listening Adam felt that the world, now a neatly marked little globe, was being exhibited to him in the other's broad palm, but somehow he could never catch a glimpse of it there. The atmosphere was rich with final philosophic conclusions, but it remained an atmosphere and nothing more: in vain the mind went gaping.

"What I say is this," the Sergeant was observing, after taking leave of his beer, "and it's a thing you'll come to understand in time; that is, if you've got the patience to work it out, which few have. You begin, every time, everywhere, with a kind of muddle, just as we're beginning with a muddle in this business—and it seems to you just a muddle, that couldn't be anything else but one—and then you begin to see, if you're a right-thinking man, not one of the impatient ones, there's such a thing as order and more of it than you'd thought. It's the mosaic, ag in. But you'll say to me—and you'll not be the first that's said it

and been answered too—you'll say, ' Yes, but is there order in a mosaic? ' ”

“ There's a car coming up the road,” Adam broke in, holding up his hand.

The other stopped and listened. “ Ah, that'll be the Inspector back again,” he remarked, descending from the heights. “ Now we shall know what's to do.”

But surely this was not the rattle of the old Ford that had brought them from the station and taken the Inspector back again? “ It may be the Inspector,” Adam remarked, “ but it's certainly not the same car, but one much better and bigger and brighter.” On it came, seemingly a powerful brute, and as it drew nearer Adam could feel a curious cold flame of excitement licking and running and leaping inside him, so that he shivered a little and rubbed his hands together. Something, he knew, was about to happen; there was a wise old beast, half a million years old at least, somewhere inside him that knew that; he could feel its fur pricking.

There was a roar, and a great light flashed by outside and then was gone. “ You're right! It's not stopping!” said Rundle, by no means disappointed. And there suddenly fell a quiet, into which Adam flung, casually, “ Yes, it's gone. You can't hear it now. Perhaps the sharp corner on the moorland road just beyond this place cuts off the sound.” His companion nodded and put a match to his pipe.

Neither was Adam disappointed, but for a very different reason. He was still certain that something was about to happen. That car, he was sure, had not really gone on, but had stopped just beyond the

corner. Some instinct made him surreptitiously work round in his chair until he partly faced the window. It was impossible for him to see out, for it showed nothing but a wavering reflection of their lamplight, but on the other hand it was very easy for anyone out there, even in passing, to see their room and hear everything said there as plainly as if it were a scene in a theatre. And even if he could not see, he could hear, and he had a quite irrational conviction that he had only to listen hard enough to hear something really significant. So he bent his head, apparently idly regarding his swinging foot and sleepily ruminating, while all the time his ears held the night, ready to pounce upon the slightest sound. For one terrifically swollen moment or two there came nothing, nothing beyond the faint call of an owl, a far-away smothered sound of knocking and laughter from the other end of the inn, and a vague chirruping from some patch of darkness, just the summer night distantly and murmurously telling its beads. And then there came something quite different, soft enough and yet as plain as a shout, something waited for since the beginning of the world, delicate foot-falls, a cautious tip-tap-tip, outside the window. Someone was there looking in at them. He raised his head and flashed a glance at the window, then looked across at the Sergeant. No, he had obviously heard nothing. Adam's heart set the whole room throbbing. Someone was there looking in, and the next move was his, for let reason go hang, he knew, the wise old fur-on-end beast knew, his bursting heart knew, that this was part of the game, that he

was in it, in everything that could possibly happen this day and night, and that now or never was the next move and that move undoubtedly his.

"Sergeant!" he called, loudly, casually, though the hand he thrust into his pocket was trembling. "Don't you think that the prisoner might be allowed another drink?"

"Well, Mr. Stewart," replied that massive pawn, in great good humour, "seeing that this is hardly what you might call the strictest form of incarceration, I think it might be managed."

"And couldn't you get them yourself this time?" Adam asked, adding, "I'm fagged." And he flipped over half a crown.

Rundle caught it and moved slowly towards the door. "Right you are. Only"—and he removed the key and held it up—"I'm going to take the liberty of locking you in while I go. Matter of form. Just in case the Inspector comes back while I'm gone. He's due now." He vanished and then the lock clicked and his footsteps could be heard crossing the hall and disappearing into the other room.

Instantly there came a tap at the window and immediately he crossed over to it. Now he could see, dimly, two forms, a face pressed against the glass.

"What are you doing there?" asked a low voice.

"I'm in the hands of Scotland Yard." Adam could not help grinning. "Incarcerated."

"Quick, then!" came the reply. "Will this open?"

It was open a little at the top and in a second Adam had pushed up the bottom half, crammed his hat on his head, and thrown one leg over the sill.

His bag! He was forgetting that. He stumbled back into the room, while a girl's voice, urgency itself, cried softly, "Oh! do hurry!" and then he grabbed his bag and scrambled through the window. "Run!" commanded the voice. There were two girls there, one already hurrying in front, and he felt his hand grasped and then all three of them were running up the road.

As they ran, they laughed softly and crazily into the night that stretched itself out before them, wide and glittering, marvellously sweet-smelling, moonlit, magical. Bright patches of sight and sound, newly-minted coinage of experience, were showered into Adam's mind: Helen and Peter running beside him, the light and shadow of the low stone walls, the drowned fields, the glimmer of road, the moon hanging over Gloam Moor, and other fragments, purple, silver and faded green, came flying in, until at last they all settled together into one—Oh, yes! that was it—"mosic," a mad and lovely "mosic." And then the three immortals turned a corner, and there, awaiting them, was a great car, its nose pointing up the high moorland road, and beside it were two more figures. For a moment or so, the five of them formed a group about the car; and someone gasped "Rescued!" and someone cried to Adam "Oh! Your Highness!" and kissed his hand; or so it seemed, for now there was no telling, now that things had got so gloriously out of hand and were blossoming riotously by themselves; but there they were, the five of them, a group all drenched in moonshine.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE KINGDOM OF MOONSHINE

O H! do get in. Hurry, hurry! Helen and I in front, and you three in the back." This from Peter, whom there was no mistaking now. There was no time for talk and they climbed in without a word, Adam taking his place in the middle of the back seat, wedged between the two women. Half a minute later, they were off, climbing toward the high moorland and the glimmer of stars. Adam looked at the night as if it were, as indeed it seemed, a strange, dark, lovely lady, moon-coloured, mistily jewelled, and for a moment these and any other grotesque adventures that might follow seemed nothing but her quaint utterances. They were all of them under her spell; even Sergeant Rundle, gaping back there at the inn with two glasses of beer in his hand, was a kind of ruminating moon-calf; and anything might happen now just because for once the night, this lovely midsummer night, was doing what he had always wanted such a night to do, it was taking charge of things itself. The fabric it wove, which had always had a tantalising pattern inside, somewhere at the back of one's mind, had now been woven even more crazily outside, trapping other people and real events in its gigantic shining arabesques. And, oddly enough, when you came to think of it, it must have begun weaving, somewhere behind

the dust and the blue, back there in the afternoon: there must have been a stray moonbeam in St. Pancras.

It was time to piece it all together, he told himself, and yet he did not feel an urgent desire to do so, at the best only a kind of obligation to try, as if a hostess had handed over to him a pretty new puzzle and left him alone with it for a few minutes. It was all growing out of the night, adventures like sudden moonlit mushrooms, and that really was enough. There was no part of him left to sort out and compare and sum up, for one half was content to gasp and enjoy and break into applause, and the other half was busy seizing hold of every shining new event and hoarding it away, perhaps for the time when nothing would happen. He stole a glance at the girl on his left, that perfumed softness there, and knew her for that other girl, Miss Ber-something-or-other, the foreign one, who was at the station. Her profile, etched in moonlight, was exquisite, and the very nearness of it a matter for wonder. As if feeling the sudden jump of his heart, she turned her face towards him, her dark lips parting into a smile; a sudden lurch of the car threw his arm over towards her and it happened that their ungloved hands touched before Adam could right himself. There was a moment's riot in his blood, but it was soon stilled, for this lovely creature, warm beside him, was not yet a person. She seemed to flow into the night.

A voice, cool, decisive, broke into his trance, the voice of his companion on the other side, apparently a woman of brisk middle-age whose personality was

compact and showed no signs of disintegrating into moonlight and starshine. "There are two things I must tell you, Mr.—er—Stewart," she remarked. "The first is that even at the risk of offending you, I cannot address you as 'Your Highness.' It is too early, far too early. There will be plenty of opportunity for that when the proper time comes, if it ever does come. No matter how excellent your claims are, at least in the sight of your friends, I think you'll admit it's preposterous to plaster high-sounding titles over a young gentleman who has just been rescued through the window of a country public-house at this time of night. Also, I must tell you who we are, as I don't suppose you know. I am Mrs. Belville, and this is Miss Bersieneff——"

"Nina Bersieneff" there came in musical syllables from the other side.

"Miss Bersieneff, whose home is in Russia, is a friend of my niece's who is on a short visit to this country. Both the girls there in front are my nieces. The one who is driving is Mrs. Maythorn. The other, who has been so energetic in your rescue, is Miss Templake. Her father, my brother, I think you met in the train."

"Yes," said Adam, "if it was he who spilt the whiskers."

"I've heard nothing of that," replied Mrs. Belville, "but I'm not surprised. He has been spilling things all his life. And, let me add, I've no patience with the whiskers. I agree with Peter, my niece, that the whiskers are entirely preposterous, and it is just like Geoffrey to consent to carry a bag full of

false beards the length of the country and then to go spilling them in railway carriages."

"Well, I must say," Adam remarked, musingly, "I don't agree with you about the whiskers. They seem to be absolutely right, whatever else is. A bag full of false whiskers excuses anything: it's a kind of end in itself. But it's my turn to introduce myself. My name is Adam Stewart."

"Adam," and Mrs. Belville lingered over the name as she repeated it. "That means, I suppose, that if you succeed, you'll be Adam the First. Or will you be Adam the Second? If you believe in Divine Right, as I take it you do, then surely you'll be Adam the Second, as the original Adam should count as a king because Divine Right must have begun at the beginning? And it's no use your protesting that that's absurd. I know it's absurd, but then I might as well inform you I think the whole thing's absurd. Even if it succeeds, and there is no saying what will not succeed in this world, it won't be any the less absurd."

Adam looked at her and then up at the moon, thoroughly mystified and a little exasperated. Even on such a night, reason must break in somewhere. "But why should I be Adam the First or Second, or anything else? I don't understand a single——"

"One moment, please, Mr. Stewart," Mrs. Belville interrupted. "Will you please turn your face up again? Thank you." And she looked closely at him, and just as he was about to break out again, cut in with, "I'm certain of it. Surely you're related to John Stewart, the shipowner?"

"I'm his son," replied Adam, a little sulkily, perhaps because he suddenly felt about six years old.

Mrs. Belville was triumphant. "I thought as much. And your mother was Marjorie Langland. And I've dandled you on my knee when you were a baby. Why, Adam Stewart, you've no more claim to the throne of this country than I have."

Adam stared. "Of course not!"

"Then what do you mean, young man," she retorted, "by masquerading here as the Stuart heir? Is it the Baron's trick? Or is it your own idea of a joke?"

"I assure you I've never had a chance yet even to outline my own idea of a joke in all this," he said, "and I don't know what it all means. I'm not masquerading as anybody, and as for Stuart heirs, I didn't know they'd been heard of for a hundred and fifty years. Who on earth am I supposed to be?"

His companion was audibly amused. "Someone you are certainly not. But I'll tell you. You are supposed to be the last heir of the Stuart family, an obscure discovery of Baron Roland's, on your way to meet him and your faithful defenders or adherents or whatever they are, known as the Companions of the Rose, who are at present gathered together, or at least the more important of them are, in Sir Arthur Baddeley-Fragge's house in Runnerdale."

Incredible, yet in a flash, it pieced everything together, and, unaware for the moment of his crashing kingdom, he satisfied his curiosity at last. The coincidence of his name and destination had led everyone astray, Peter's father, the Inspector, these girls,

all had mistaken him for this astounding new Young Pretender, this monstrous anachronism. Nothing, it was obvious, could be more crazy than to set up such a claim at this late hour, but now, his curiosity partly satisfied and the ruins of his kingdom visibly about him, crazy as it all was, he was sorry the claim was not really his.

Nina had been listening and now broke in with, "Then are you not his 'Ighness? "

Adam dwindled rapidly. "No, Miss Bersieneff, I'm not. Just a mere tourist."

She made a tiny clucking sound and looked away, leaving Adam a bitter and futile pigmy, staring at a night that was one huge cheat. Then there were those two girls in front, soon to be disillusioned. And Peter would soon look right through him again, as if he were not there; and Helen, who, by the way, was quite unaccountably married, would glimmer with laughter for a second, look gravely at him again and then turn indifferently away for ever. It would be far worse now than it was before. He had been thrust in, gloriously in, only to crawl out, a miserable impostor. And yet he had known throughout that he must have been mistaken for someone else, and it was very odd, very jolly, to be the victim of such a mistake, to be hurled into adventure when you had expected nothing—he could hear himself desperately telling someone how odd, how jolly, it was—but he suddenly felt flattened, wretched.

"Is that where we're going now, to Sir Arthur Baddeley-Fragge's?" he asked.

"We shall be there in less than a quarter of an

hour," Mrs. Belville replied, with what seemed like grim relish. "We're in Runnerdale already." They had left the Gloam valley behind, crossed the summit of Gloam Moor, and were now beginning the winding descent into Runnerdale, which was spreading its lovely length below, a long narrow chalice brimmed with moonlight, waiting for a young uncrowned king from nowhere. It caught at Adam's heart. For the first time in his life he had been compelled to deny that he was one of that bitter-sweet race, born to be heroes of tragi-comedy, to be princes in exile, those Stuarts to whom he had not given a thought since he last laid aside his history books and Waverley novels; and now for the first time in his life he really felt like one of them, a king who had lost his crown in a ditch, a royal Pierrot smiling but hollow-eyed under the moon. And then a glance at Mrs. Belville's composed face turned these thoughts into so many fiddlesticks to be hastily swept away.

"I'm awfully sorry," he began, gloomily, "but really it wasn't my fault. You had better tell the others, and then drop me before we reach the house. I can get put up somewhere in West Rudge or East Rudge, and even if it's too late, it doesn't matter, a night like this. I'm no worse off, because I was coming here, anyhow."

"Nonsense," Mrs. Belville remarked, briskly. "I'm not at all sorry. I prefer Marjorie Langland's son to any young mountebank that the Baron may have discovered. Your mother and I are old friends; I know your father, too, an admirable man; and what I know about your family is worth all this white rose

mummery. Do you think I am going to allow you to wander about this valley all night, trying to sleep under haystacks? You're not opposed to this business are you? You have no absurd strong convictions on the subject?"

"I'm all for it, whatever it is," he replied, "I'm willing to join anything to-night."

"Indeed! Not exactly a safe state of mind for a young man to be in. It's probably the weather and this absurd rushing about in motor-cars." She settled herself more comfortably. "But, in that case, you must come along to the house with us, as one of our party. I insist upon it, and I know the Baddeley-Fragges will be delighted. You must at least pretend to be a sympathizer because otherwise you know too much and might be regarded as a dangerous person. But that, I suspect, won't be difficult. The difficulty will be in preventing you, after a day there, making yourself ridiculous about it all."

"But, Mrs. Belville, are you yourself a sympathizer?" asked Adam, who found it impossible to detect any fervour in his companion's references to this fantastic movement.

"Of course not. I cannot be enthusiastic about such antics at my time of life, indeed, could not have been at any time since I left the nursery. To my mind, the whole thing is like a game on the nursery floor. You have only to remember the whiskers to realize how preposterous it all is. The whiskers are typical. But, on the other hand, I'm not opposed to it. I'm a benevolent neutral, anxious to see that nobody of any importance gets hurt, and, if possible,

to prevent the thing from going too far. If it doesn't go too far, and I'm afraid there are signs that it will, then at least it will have kept some of the people here out of worse mischief. I'm here because I like an occasional visit to this part of the world, and find Lady Baddeley-Fragge a quiet restful woman, a little silly, perhaps, and far too easy with her husband, but a pleasant person; and because I want to keep an eye on my brother and my two nieces there."

"Are they enthusiastic what d'you call 'em—Jacobites?" he demanded, making hay while the sun shone.

"My brother and Peter are, though not exactly in the same way," she replied. "My brother has always been ridiculous about something, and the more impossible it is, the more enthusiastic he becomes. Peter has a rather different temperament, and I'm glad that she has this or she might have nothing and merely drift as so many girls do now. She is very serious about it, very severe too, and is really a delightful child. What Helen, Mrs. Maythorn, my other niece there, thinks about it I don't know. It probably amuses her, just as most things, even that large husband of hers, amuse her; and is to her a kind of play, with lights, music, fine scenery and costumes, and a very charming part in it, with limelight and applause, for herself. She is, you know, one of the most charming girls in the world, but very mischievous, and has humbugged everybody about her since the time she was in the cradle." And she looked at Adam as if to suggest that it would only be

a few hours before his name would swell the list of the humbugged.

And what said soft and perfumed Russia, now sitting more kindly beside him? Was she a Jacobite too, Adam asked.

"Yes, yes," cried Nina, who had apparently recovered now from her disappointment. "I believe in the royalism, to bring kings, real kings, back upon the world." And as she turned her wide shining eyes upon him, he felt that he too believed in the royalism, more than he had ever believed in anything else. He could not for the life of him see yet what it was all about, but already he was heart and soul in the cause. Restore the Stuarts!—why, he was ready to take up bow and arrows and restore the Plantagenets if the Baron, the more and more incredible Baron, could only find one! He was sure now that the only thing that could possibly prevent such a night as this, with all its beauty, its burden of dream and strange desire, from breaking a man's heart, would be a cause, and the more hopelessly lost the cause the better. He smiled back at Nina, and then suddenly tried to look stern, noble, as unlike a tourist as possible.

They were now in the dale itself and could not be very far from the house. There came a thought like a sudden chill. "I say, Mrs. Belville," he exclaimed, "as there'll be such a lot to explain to your nieces, hadn't we better stop the car before it reaches the house and tell them everything? Otherwise there may be a colossal anti-climax at the house."

Mrs. Belville nodded her agreement, but did

ADAM IN MOONSHINE

nothing until they had passed through West Rudge, silent, deserted, and looking like a faded backcloth in the soft moonlight, and the lights of a large house shone through some trees a little way in front of them. Then she loudly called a halt.

The car stopped, and two faces, still radiant, triumphant, turned round with a "What's the matter?"

"My dears," cried Mrs. Belville, preparing to enjoy herself, "I'm sorry to disappoint you, but this is not the man." At this there was an outcry, under which Adam's heart sank. "Not the man," she repeated, with evident relish. Then followed a flood of explanations, with everybody talking at once, until at last some consistent narrative was hammered out between them. Adam had to explain what had happened in the train and the inn, and, in return, learned how Templelake, Peter's father, had mistaken him, after hearing his name and destination, for the Baron's Stuart discovery, a young man who was supposed to be on his way to Runnerdale, and how he had fallen in with his daughter and her party somewhere on the road outside Lobley, and they, with the more powerful car, had agreed to travel by way of Gloam and make inquiries there about this mysterious young man, who had, it was rumoured, somehow attracted the notice of the secret service. Something they had heard at the station had made them cautious, so they had peeped through the window, and the rest was plain to everybody concerned. So they explained, added link to link, loudly corrected one another, and became flushed and noisy

and, in spite of the anti-climax, somehow triumphant, with the inevitable result that they all suddenly felt friendly and rather intimate. Adam not only took heart but began to feel gloriously at ease. Nina smiled upon him. Mrs. Belville insisted that the son of her old friend Marjorie Langland was worth a gross of dubious Stuarts from nowhere. Dark Helen no longer looked indifferently away, but shone like a star over the whole recital. Only Peter showed any resentment at this elaboration of coincidence.

"It can't be helped," she remarked, in the disgusted tone that usually accompanies this phrase, "but I really think it would have been better if you had stayed there. It might, at least, have kept the police on a false scent for a time."

"Don't be fanatical, my dear," replied Mrs. Belville, much to Adam's relief. "Mr. Stewart deserves a better fate than to be a herring drawn across a trail. And after all it is not his fault that he has been dragged into all this absurd plotting. You have at least gained a recruit." At which Adam, feeling a fool and thinking it safer to jump into the part, made an elaborate salute.

It was Helen who sketched a delicious little salute in return. "Will you be a Companion of the Rose, Mr. Stewart?" she inquired, as she stood up in the car and looked down on him.

"I will. I have always wanted to be a Companion of the Rose." He threw a slight suggestion of mock gravity into his voice, but it was trembling a little as he looked up and smiled.

ADAM IN MOONSHINE

"Quite so." This came, like two chill raindrops, from Mrs. Belville. "I have insisted that he goes on to the Baddeley-Fragges' as a member of our party. And he assures me that he is ready to join anything to-night."

Peter made a gesture of impatience. "But it's not a matter of joining anything. That's not the point. It's——"

"Yes, it is the point," Helen interrupted, but sweetly, "it's the whole point." And she flashed a look at Adam so swiftly and delicately comprehensive that it seemed to him she alone might have created the night.

"Point or no point!" cried Mrs. Belville, "Mr. Stewart comes with us to the Baddeley-Fragges' and it's high time we arrived there. Drive on, Helen."

They started again and within five minutes were sailing up a curved drive that finally brought them to the front of a rambling grey stone house, almost white in the moonlight, with several lighted windows and a spacious hall hospitably open to the night. The triumphant bray of the car brought out a butler and a maid, then some other figures, and all was a hubbub of greetings and introductions and handshakings and a confusion of bags and discarded wraps and sticks and odd packages. This high tide swept Adam out of the car into the hall, where he found himself being introduced by Mrs. Belville to his hostess, a thin woman in late middle-age who somehow looked like a piece of faded needlework, and greeted him pleasantly but vaguely, as if he were not quite real. Much to his relief, nothing was being said

of the night's adventures and his brief reign as Adam the First, or Second; he was regarded as a friend of Mrs. Belville and the Templakes who had suddenly attached himself to the cause and to them. The owner of Runner Hall, for such he learned was the name of the house, he met a minute or two later, finding him as pleasant as his wife but a thought less vague. Sir Arthur was tall and thin, a brittle-looking figure, very dignified, stiff, and obviously weak, suggesting a devitalized Sir Roger de Coverley. He expressed great pleasure at the sight of Adam; the name he bore being itself a passport to their friendship; his interest in the common cause more than welcome; his appearance among them very gratifying, particularly as the gathering lacked young men; and there was much else from Sir Arthur in this vein, quite a speech in fact, of which a great deal never penetrated Adam's ears, assailed as they were by the chatter of the others. But it was a relief to find himself welcomed without question, for he had been dreading this moment and still felt an interloper, almost an impostor. As he followed a maid to his room, up the broad stairs and along to the end of a corridor on the first floor, he embraced the still mysterious, incredible cause, and with it the images of his host and hostess and his new friends, not excluding the obdurate Peter, with something like genuine fervour. His room, a small one at the corner of a wing and overlooking a moonlit expanse of lawn, was anything but startling, hardly to be distinguished from half a hundred rooms he had occupied in other people's houses, neat little spare

rooms with the chill on them, and yet when he caught sight of his bag awaiting him there, it looked like something dropped from another and dustier world, the things he removed from it like possessions from an old incarnation.

Washed and brushed, with some of the moonlight out of his eyes, he descended the stairs to follow his host's instructions and join the other guests in the drawing-room. What was to come he could not imagine, but for once the big fat hamper of life was before him untouched by his too fervid anticipation. Here in this house, whose yellow interior had already sharpened, compressed, the mood he had known under the open night, was everything desirable, making even his vague longings of the afternoon, the foolish fretting afternoon, seem contemptible. Here all the sweet shining things of this life were heaped together, bounded at last by the four walls that enclosed him; and all else, the whole outside world, a desert. He threw it a look of pity, hugged his good fortune for a second, and then pushed open the drawing-room door.

What he expected to see is beyond conjecture, for he did not know himself, but what he actually did see, with an absurd little pang of disappointment, was a long low room, filled with kindly lamplight, and at ease in it, chatting away, half a dozen persons, including Sir Arthur himself, who stepped forward to introduce him to the company. So far as it could be covered by a brief glance, the company, which had not yet been joined by the other members of his party, was certainly disappointing. Where was the

Baron? Absent, he could only hope. And then he made his bows. There was Lady Matchways, an old lady of more promise than her companions, for she had an open, eager face and an air of being at once frail and indomitable. Beside her was a Mr. Hooby, one of those round-faced, clean-shaven Americans who are so inhumanly clean that they appear to have scrubbed and brushed away all individuality and do not seem to be real persons. Then there was a stringy woman, with a pecking motion of the head, who had just been loudly extolling the unfailing loyalty to the Stuart cause that still existed in the Highlands, and was not pleased at being interrupted until she heard Adam's name, when she was almost frantic with enthusiasm, and showed disturbing signs of wishing to take charge of him. She was a Miss Satterly, and clearly to be avoided. The other two were the Reverend Philip Brasure, a specimen some thirty odd years of age of a familiar clerical type, inevitably High and resolutely and quite unendurably jolly; and a Major Storching, middle-aged and apparently made of wood, which at least explained the extraordinary difficulty he had in making any articulate sounds.

Adam made his tour of the room, scoring up his rapid little mental notes, with a sinking heart. Had he expected too much? Was the old cheat at work again? True, there were others to come, and he hurriedly took stock. There was Mr. Templelake, himself a not entirely uninteresting water-colour sketch, and with him would come Siddell. But it was plainly ridiculous to expect anything of Siddell,

disregarded long ago. Then there was the admirable, if rather disconcerting, Mrs. Belville, and the whole lovely carful, smiling Helen and Nina, angry Peter, not to be thought of with an unquickened heart. Why, each of them, even Peter, if there was any kindness in her, was sufficient in herself to leaven fifty such lumpish companies, to shine through a house ten times the size of this. And then there was still the Baron, for whose sake so many whiskers had been bought and packed away and finally spilt over Canon Drewbridge. He recovered his spirits, accepted and lit a cigarette, smiled from a safe distance at Miss Satterly, who was about to recapture the Highlands, and exchanged commonplaces with his host and Mr. Brasure and stares with the Major. Templelake and Siddell, he was told, had telephoned to say that they had been delayed on the road. Siddell, it appeared, was the new organizing secretary of the society or whatever it was, the Companions of the Rose, and had just been engaged, on the very highest references, by Sir Arthur himself. They were rapidly approaching a crisis in the history of the organization, Mr. Stewart must understand, and there was now much work, very delicate and even dangerous work, to do, which demanded the services of an experienced organizer, who might later have to direct a large number of agents all over the country. Mr. Stewart appreciated the situation and applauded Sir Arthur's good sense and judgment, to which Sir Arthur replied at length, in what Adam afterwards learnt from Helen to call his best Mansfield Park manner. But where, Adam asked himself, was the Baron. He was strangely

reluctant to ask the question aloud: it was as if he was afraid he would be told that there was no such person.

Then suddenly, dramatically, the door was flung open to admit into the room an enormous figure. "Ah! here is the Baron," murmured Sir Arthur. The Baron, indeed! The man himself may only have been some six feet high, broad in proportion, and fat out of all proportion, but such was the effect he created, as he towered to the ceiling and went swelling out to each side, that he seemed in danger of cracking the room. His whole appearance was odd, startling. He was loosely clothed in a half-acre or so of light grey flannel, wore an open collar with unusually big wings, as if he were a statesman in the 'eighties, and with it a surprising large white tie in a sailor's knot. Dominating the collar and tie, and even the ponderous belly below, was a nose, boldly drawn and generously coloured, that came jutting out in full force but turned a little to one side at the tip. Such a nose caught the eye and held it, so that the rest of his features, unusual as they were, merely seemed to be standing round it in admiration. Above were two small but very bright eyes restlessly lodged under bushy brows, and a glistening forehead crowned by an upstanding mass of iron-grey hair. The lower part of his face, falling heavily away, was decorated, as if by a magnificent afterthought, by a comparatively small dark moustache and imperial. For the rest, he had neat hands and feet, was surprisingly quick and agile in his movements, and might have been anything between fifty and sixty-five years of age.

ADAM IN MOONSHINE

Sir Arthur, now more faded and brittle than ever, instantly made them known to one another. "Baron Roland, this is Mr. Adam Stewart, a friend of Mrs. Belville's who is anxious to join us."

The Baron bowed, saying in a curious, rich, hoarse voice: "He has joined us already. He joined us long ago, perhaps the day he was born. Now some people, hearing your name, Mr. Stewart, might read in it the very proclamation of defeat, see in you, without reference to your admirable person, of course, a walking symbol of their pessimism. Two lost causes conjoined: Adam and Stewart. We read it otherwise, eh, Sir Arthur?" And he stopped and stared at his host, who smiled vaguely and rather nervously like a gentleman suddenly compelled to assist in a conjuring trick. "Yes, we read it differently," he went on. "You arrive as a good omen. Our task is to win over Adam to the Stuarts. You have already joined them together and thrived on the conjunction, even having rich blood to spare for your cheeks. A rose in the blood, eh? And therefore, more auguries. But I embarrass you? You are saying to yourself, 'The Baron is in execrable taste.' But a word." And as Sir Arthur drifted away, the Baron led Adam to a corner and fixed him with his little bright eyes.

"I have heard already," he whispered, "from our friend Mrs. Belville, who is the very voice of sharp commonsense and therefore to be trusted with the facts, the bare facts, but otherwise not capable of doing the story justice. But I understand. A king for five minutes on a midsummer night, a king of moonshine, isn't that how it runs? And now you're

telling yourself it's all moonshine. And if it is, you know, you might have been king yet. Don't you think you might have played the part a little longer?"

"Well, I'm not good at playing parts, you know," Adam remarked as easily as he could, for there was something very strange and compelling about his companion.

"Ah, I wonder. But not perhaps with Mrs. Belville." And the Baron's nose, turned to one side, contrived to look humorous and intimate. "What a load for commonsense to bring through the moonlight! Youth and Beauty! You'll leaven us, Mr. Stewart, and we need it. A lean company, so far; too much string and sawdust. Always excepting, of course, my old friend Lady Matchways, whose defection from the Anarchist cause to ours I regard as a personal triumph."

"Why, was she an Anarchist?" Adam inquired, looking across the room at the frail old lady.

"One of the greatest and one of the last of the old school, what you might call the romantic school, with their garrets and bombs, of the 'eighties," the Baron replied. "She still believes in their methods, grandiose outlines, splashes of colour, and I have difficulty persuading her to accept anything more restrained. It was partly for her sake that I ordered the false whiskers. I felt she was missing something. Disguise is the essence of the old romantic spirit. Escape and decoration is its secret. Think of the Pre-Raphaelites."

But Adam was too busy eyeing the company and listening to the snatches of talk that came floating

their way, to think of the Pre-Raphaelites. At the other end of the room, Lady Matchways was keeping Mr. Hooby round-eyed with a flow of words and some ample vivacious gestures that seemed to illustrate the sudden end of some public buildings and public figures. Mrs. Belville was plainly putting Miss Satterly's loyal Highlanders in their place. Mr. Brasure was addressing Lady Baddeley-Fragge as if she were quite a number of sympathetic parishioners gathered together. Sir Arthur and Major Storching appeared to be exchanging syllables as if they were pieces at chess. Adam suddenly felt confident, superior.

"You're looking at us," the Baron remarked, "you're criticizing, you're putting together some deadly phrases, which I insist upon hearing in the near future, as soon as we are sufficiently intimate to exchange libels on our friends."

"I'm still wondering what it's all about," Adam rejoined. "I still don't know much."

The Baron waved a hand. "To-morrow you shall have all the theories, all the facts, to play with in the daylight. To-night, be content with the atmosphere, your adventures, your moonlight, your penetrating eye. Take these to bed with you, and then in the morning, incredulous morning, you shall have your reasons. We have them, solid ones."

At this moment Adam looked across towards the door, and there, newly arrived, were the night's three graces, slim and lovely: Peter, a slender shoot in green, with her proud little cropped head and clear grey eyes; Nina, who was now seen to be fair,

THE KINGDOM OF MOONSHINE

not as English girls are fair, but with a strange metallic tone in her fairness, with bronze bobbed hair, hazel eyes, and a curved scarlet mouth, all decked out in soft blue fabric and white skin; and behind them, in crimson, was dark Helen, a little smile on her lips, her eyes shining across at him. The room glowed round them. Grace and colour were all theirs, as if the garden had taken to sending in its flowers as visitors; but there was about them something more, something indefinable, more potent than their obvious witchery, as they stood there for a moment, silent, smiling, in the pale golden lamp-light; something that caught at the swelling heart and troubled the mind, a sudden pang shot through the drowning sweetness.

"Exactly!" whispered the Baron, and made towards them.

"We've really only come to say 'Good-night,'" exclaimed Peter, a little coldly, as if there were still much to be forgiven.

"You have only to say 'Good-morning' and 'Good-night' to fill our day," said the Baron, graciously if a trifle enigmatically. And he shepherded them across the room towards Adam. "You will, at least, say something to my new recruit, to the wandering knight you have rescued, to keep him company until the morning. Eh, Mr. Stewart?"

Adam turned to Peter. "I believe you've not forgiven me yet, Miss Temple, for not being a captured king. But you have the satisfaction of looking forward to someone more imposing than I am, and I promise to be a most energetic and

obedient follower." A stiff and foolish speech this, he felt, and longed for a sword and cockade and trumpet calls outside the window to carry it off. She said nothing, but smiled and bowed ironically, but then her eyes, such clear honest eyes, met and held him in so frank and comradely a fashion that he suddenly felt elated.

Nina, who had glanced round the room rather blankly, now curved her lips at him, laid a light but disturbing hand on his arm, and said sweetly, "I have forgiven you. You shall be a fine young Royaleest soldier, 'ero." A small but heady brew this to be tasted in company.

And now Helen floated forward, slipped one arm inside Peter's and tilted the lovely apricot curve of her face towards him, while her eyes laughed outright and her mouth demurely smiled. "This for our latest and youngest gentleman recruit. Take this for company until the morning, Sir Knight." And she held out to him a rose, a white rose, newly gathered with the dew on it from the moonlit garden.

"Oh, fortunate youth!" cried the Baron, as Adam took the flower. "See what the night has brought you! It is the badge of our service. And do you still want reasons? Go dream!"

At this they broke up in a confusion of plans for the morning and "Good-nights," and in a few minutes Adam, overburdened with images of railway trains, false beards, detectives, inn parlours, flying motor-cars, comic or beautiful Jacobites, was on his way upstairs, still with the rose in his hand. He ha'

THE KINGDOM OF MOONSHINE

enough pageantry in his head to keep him awake for a week, but his body was twenty-four years old, had travelled far that day, had been drinking heavily of the strong moorland air, and so was bent on sleep, let the mind cut its capers in whatever limbo it could discover for itself. The rose drooped and shed its fragrance; the moon sank down the sky; and Adam slept.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE MORNING'S COMPANY

"DEMOCRACY," said the Baron, "is dead. And why?" He raised his fork impressively.

"Why, Baron, because humanity must have Roam-ance." This, very solemnly, from Mr. Hooby, who was busy at the sideboard. "We cannot live by bread al-one." And he cut himself an enormous slice of boiled ham.

"The reason in a nutshell," said the Baron. "Because man is a spirit, eh, Mr. Hooby? And I'll trouble you for a little of that ham."

They were all at breakfast, the Baron, Mr. Hooby, Mr. Temple, and Adam, who had been there some time and was now loitering over a final cup of tea and a cigarette. He had seen none of the other members of the party except Sir Arthur, who had come and gone, a wraith in the morning sunshine, and the picked-up Siddell, a clean-shaven, colourless fellow of indeterminate age with a manner at once brisk and detached, who had also come and gone. Over his porridge, Adam had fitted together the puzzle of yesterday's adventures with Temple to their mutual satisfaction. With the bacon and eggs the Baron and Mr. Hooby had arrived, strangely solid and convincing and with nothing of them stolen away by a vanished dream. The ruin of parliamentary government in Europe had been hastily added to the ruin of breakfast dishes, and as Adam's teeth

crashed through toast spread with marmalade, half a dozen arguments had gone crashing through nineteenth-century Liberalism. And now, his cigarette alight, breakfast was done and democracy was dead.

"The age of political bagmen has been succeeded by the age of political gunmen," said the Baron, after attacking his ham, "the vote-cadging by the 'hands up!' But the human spirit fares no better, and may fare worse if it has no choice but between pinchbeck Napoleons, mountebanks turned brigands, and the Marxian riff-raff, Jews without God. These last are the more hateful set of the two. I've met some of them, the leaders, not the mere crowd of agitators, and they're really remarkable; inhuman fanatics, monsters of will, slaves of an idea. But the idea's out of Hell, and some of them, mark my words, are ambassadors from the Court of Hell. Did you know the Devil had his representatives here, Mr. Hooby?"

"That is not a notion that had occurred to me, Baron."

"You'll find a list of them in an old book by a Frenchman. I once met one myself, twenty years ago in Valparaiso, a little fellow with a dead white face, who pretended to be an importer of hardware."

Mr. Hooby laid aside his knife and fork and took out a little notebook and pencil. "Now, there's a book I'd be real glad to read," he said, flashing his spectacles, "though I'm no stoddent of the occ-ult. But I'm a stoddent of the human mind, and that book should be a cure-ee-osity. I'd like to have the name of that book, Baron."

"You shall." And the Baron wrinkled his enormous forehead for a moment. "It's called *Les Farfadets*, and the author, who knew all about devils, was Charles Berbiguier de Terre-Neuve du Thym."

Mr. Hooby made an entry in his little notebook, remarking at the same time: "And on another occasion, I'd like to hear from you the story of that little hardware importer of Valparaiso."

"Again, you shall," said the Baron, his nose hinting drollery but the rest of him fixed in solemnity. "I'll make you see that fungus face of his and smell his brimstone, Mr. Hooby. But surely, gentlemen, though you may not have met genuine emissaries from Hell, you've run across creatures here and there, women some of them too, who have at least letters of credit. You've caught the whiff of sulphur, eh? Well, well, you've either been fortunate in your company or not sufficiently discerning. This world shades off into some kind of Heaven and Hell on each side, nothing final, of course, but places filled with the blessed and the damned, and beings who are all either of good or evil will. Their wills master ours, their dreams colour our dreams, and sometimes they themselves come amongst us in the strangest disguises. We don't know who rubs shoulders with us or shakes us by the hand. A doorway in a side-street might lead you out of what you suppose to be this world altogether, into Hell or Heaven. Two men I know—but there's just time, I think, for another cup of coffee." And he helped himself to coffee, lit a very long black cheroot, and settled back

gigantically into his chair, apparently forgetting the two little men he had hung between Heaven and Hell in his hearer's minds.

Templeake was the first to dismiss them and to return to the chief subject in hand. "You think, then, Baron," he remarked, "that our strongest argument is not the perfectly just claims of the Stuart line so much as the necessity for returning to monarchic government?" It was clearly not the first time he had achieved this history-book sentence.

The Baron puffed a cloud of smoke at it. "It depends on our company, but for people in general it's certainly the strongest argument. Claims that have not been seriously pressed for over a century lose force. Very few people care about the Stuarts or regard them as anything but picturesque figures in history. Even Mr. Stewart here"—at which Adam presented the six eyes with his blushes—"though he bears the name, has probably never given them a thought. If he has, he probably imagines, like most people, that the members of the present royal house of Bavaria are the heirs, and he has no desire to be ruled by the Bavarians. Even if we could allow, as we have agreed we can't, gentlemen, that the marriage of the Duke of Modena to his niece, Mary, was valid in English law—and the Bavarian claims hang on that, of course—we could do nothing with such claimants, completely foreign as they are, at this late hour. Nobody would look at them. If I had not found proofs of that other line of descent, proofs that I hope to produce before this week is out, and a young English heir, willing to take up his claim,

on his way here now to join us, we could have done nothing. Our argument stands on the justice of his claim and the suitability of his person and sympathies, English to the marrow."

He looked at them and Templelake murmured and Mr. Hooby nodded their agreement. Adam said nothing, but grappled with the feeling that he was somehow taking part in a vague historical novel.

"I say our argument stands on those things," the Baron resumed, "but there must be more in it than that. Look at it from the other side. We know that the present monarchy, which is one only in name, will be swept away within this next two years and a republic set up in its place. It is useless attempting to strengthen the existing royal house, because it has deliberately weakened itself, thrown away its prerogatives so that it can't reclaim them. To have a real monarchy, we must begin again, and we can only begin with the Stuarts, who still represent, particularly in Scotland and Ireland, the kingly idea. The old sentiment still exists. But even where it doesn't, where the Stuarts themselves have been forgotten, the idea they represent still exists, for the idea is eternal. It is our only hope left in politics. We can only be saved by a young king from nowhere with a claim as slender and yet as strong as cords of silk. His government would be the exact opposite of all the governments we have to-day or likely to have to-morrow: it would be weak where they are strong, and strong where they are weak. Contrary to all the others, it would be weak as a show of force and strong in its appeal to the imagination. It would have

more strength inside men's heads than out, turning a dirty game into poetry. Even if it should succeed, it would still remain for ever a lost cause, because we can never completely translate into actual life the dream of passionate loyalty it creates: the glamorous idea remains, never to be fully realized."

Mr. Hooby, who clearly had all his nation's love of oratorical effort, nodded his head admiringly. Templelake broke in shyly with something, but his words never arranged themselves in Adam's mind, for at that moment, with an odd touch of drama, there came the sound of a girl's voice singing. It was Helen, idly carolling as she passed through the hall, and there came floating into them:

*I think myself to be as wise
As he that gazeth on the skies. . . .*

Templelake's speech trailed away and they all stared before them in silence. The voice had come, as apt as incidental music, to reinforce whatever drama was being enacted, but it had come with all the shattering urgency of music and left that drama in pieces, their words and ideas so many dry husks.

Something enigmatic flitted across the Baron's face like a strange bird across a lighted doorway, and he flung at Adam a most curiously kindling glance. But it was he who broke the tiny spell. "There you have it, gentlemen. What need to say more? One of our old Jacobite ballads, Mr. Hooby. 'When the King Enjoys His Own Again.'" And then, turning to Templelake: "Does that mean our fair scouts are setting out?"

Templake nodded. "They are going in Helen's car down the dale as far as Semper, where they can look about them while they lunch, then back, and down the Lobley road, just as we arranged."

The Baron heaved his great bulk out of the chair and stood looking down upon them. "This time they know to look for the ——?" And he made a strange sign in the air, which produced an answering nod from Peter's father. "Good!" cried the Baron, "there'll be no more wandering knights brought in, eh, Mr. Stewart? A real king or nothing, what you might call a daylight choice."

Adam stood up, too, and found his voice. "Well, I'm abiding by my moonlit decision," and he made a little bow, aware that the retort, gallant but a little stiff, young-mannish, must be carried off somehow. Then he hastily pulled out his tobacco pouch to show that he was completely at ease, while the Baron lowered his crimson standard of nose as a faintly mocking return, and the other two, out of their depth, stared blankly. They all broke up, Adam turning to the open French windows that looked out upon the morning blaze of lawn.

"Do you know, Templake," came the Baron's voice, now slightly lowered, behind him, "if that Russian girl is with them?"

The other believed that she was not, but resting, idling, hanging about, and was obviously ready to shrug Nina out of existence. Nor could he say, following a further question, who exactly she was. A friend of his daughter's, partner in one of those quick chattering friendships that girls like to build

up in a week and destroy some afternoon when they have nothing better to do; only over here on a short visit, from the Continent, France perhaps, certainly not direct from Russia; apparently of good family, abounding in princesses, and of strong royalist sympathies. He knew no more, and clearly cared even less: Nina was not for him. Perhaps, Adam reflected a little viciously, she was not a water-colour type.

"A fine-looking girl, that, Baron. A girl you'd notice." This, reflectively, from Mr. Hooby.

"A beautiful bronze, shall we say," replied the Baron, "though not with metal in her veins, whatever there is in her head. But is that all you have to say, Mr. Hooby?"

"Well," and he almost sang it, "well, I'm trying to figure it out. You see, Baron, I've seen that girl before somewhere, but I just can't call to mind where and when it was."

"Ah, you, too!" cried the Baron, and then, lowering his voice, "for I'm certain I've seen her before. And I shall remember where." The door was opened and they passed out, but as they went Adam caught the Baron's voice dying away to a mutter of "And, meanwhile, I think she's better here where we can ——." And then it was all tantalizingly lost.

Adam filled his pipe and looked out at the sunlit garden as if it were a vulgar advertisement of something he would never dream of buying. He felt suddenly resentful. Things were taking a wrong turn this morning. Helen and Peter should not have gone off like that, gone off for the whole day; there was something unfriendly in their contriving such an

independent existence. Here he was, kicking his heels, while without a word they went off to look for this young unknown with the mysterious sign. It was all nonsense, this dashing about the moorland roads making masonic signs at every chance passer-by. And then all this mysterious fuss about Nina, these nods and winks and enigmatical remarks that might have been lifted out of the nearest cheap *feuilleton*—all nonsense, too! What was the matter with Nina? He patched together from memories of gold hair, bronze-brown eyes and curved parted lips, a wavering but glamorous image of her, and smiled at it with a sudden though not unforced tenderness. She at least had not rushed away to gather some more royal heirs from the roadside, but was still somewhere here, accessible, friendly. He found himself forming an alliance with Nina, now the day's bright promise.

After lighting his pipe, he stood a moment irresolute. More than half the morning was gone already. How should he spend what was left? He moved a sauntering pace or two nearer the open window, but the sound of the door opening behind him brought him to a halt. Turning round he saw the Baron's nose and two twinkling little eyes looking in at him. "Mr. Stewart," whispered the hoarse voice, "the first door on the left here is that of the library, and behind that door are our friends, Miss Satterly and Mr. Brasure, representing genealogy and genuflexions. They have written and had printed a loyal address to the Highland gentry—we expect some leaders of the clans here later in the week—and are now addressing envelopes in a fine pointed hand. In

another moment Miss Satterly will be here to ask for your assistance. There are still six hundred envelopes waiting to be addressed before the afternoon post."

"I write such a vile hand, Baron," said Adam, "that the Highland gentry would never open my envelopes. I'd better disappear."

"Try the road to East Rudge," whispered the head, and then vanished.

Adam walked out by way of the window, turned to his left to be out of range as soon as possible, and then sauntered across the lawn. The morning sunshine, in which the garden was freshly and deliciously bathed, vanquished his ill-humour, already undermined by the little scene, suggesting intimacy, with the Baron, and by his narrow escape from Miss Satterly and her envelopes. Unthinkable to spend this young day's blue and gold, its moorland scent and drifting petals, on envelopes! He drew nearer a figure in white bending over a rose-bush, and out of his restored good humour, sustained by bumpers of vinous air, ventured to throw a cheerful "Good morning!" across the dwindling space of lawn. He then saw that it was Lady Baddeley-Fragge, faintly flushed and happy, with gardening gloves, string and large scissors. She looked less faded as she turned round to return his greeting, smiling vaguely, down Adam, feeling at once easy and stalwart beside her nervous fragility, decided that he liked her, somewhere busied herself with string and scissors, trick of it at home, deft, confident, and loving, in this suddenly. roses, her soul peeping out of her eyes and nodded

and Adam agreed that it was a beautiful morning, that it was going to be hot, but not too hot, that they had been fortunate this month with the weather, that this was delightful country. Dull stuff, of course, an exchange of platitudes with a faded lady, but for some obscure reason, Adam, who knew that he was only a shadow, something from an uneasy dream, in that white and crimson sweet-smelling reality of hers, took pleasure in it all and was in no hurry to be gone.

She had a passion for flowers? A vanished girlhood bloomed again for a second in her cheeks as she admitted that she had. "Somehow," she went on, "they mean more and more every year. Above all, the roses. They're so lovely and—and dependable, and yet so surprising. Sometimes I wonder why they come; and sometimes, in winter, when the days are dark—and we have such long winters here, you know, but somehow I don't care to go abroad as we used to—I wonder if they will ever come again. But here they are, so many of them, so lovely. And yet, next winter, when they have all gone, I shall begin wondering again. It's absurd, of course, but perhaps you understand what I mean, Mr. Stewart?"

Adam eagerly assured her that he did.

"Thus emboldened she resumed: "I remember first talking like this to Baron Roland. He is a handsome man, who says curious things that I cannot understand, and sometimes I think he is merely flexing at everything. But he made a remark then addressed to me very beautiful, although it may leaders of very stupid and sentimental, for I know now address young people think about such things. He

said that my love for the roses was itself a kind of rose, and that perhaps that was how it appeared to God." Shy yet defiant, she looked at him for a moment, then bent again to her flowers with a vague apologetic laugh.

They lapsed into easy commonplaces again and once more Adam became a murmuring shadow. Had he met Mr. Siddell yet?—so polite and efficient, so satisfactory; Sir Arthur was delighted; he had never liked the routine work, the organizing; Mr. Siddell, who had just gone down to East Rudge on some errand, would make all the difference. And had he seen Mrs. Belville? She too had gone in the direction of the village, and some things had arrived for her since she left. Perhaps Adam would be kind enough to walk that way and tell her? Yes, the turn to the right at the front gate. So Adam, not sorry to have some tiny commission, lounged away and carried with him down the long cool drive, with its dark walls of rhododendron, the thought of his hostess, pale, fragile, bending over her blazing flowers. He was pursued by a feeling that the platitudes they had exchanged had bridged the gulf between two planets. There was nothing extraordinary about his hostess, of that he was as sure now as he had been the night before, even though he did feel more kindly towards her; there were thousands of women up and down the country, buried away in gardens like this, who were just like her; but undoubtedly there was something extraordinary about life, which had a trick of growing richer and more disturbing quite suddenly. Look at the way in which people smiled and nodded

ADAM IN MOONSHINE

and talked together and yet were quite unreal to one another, with a strangeness peeping out of their eyes!

He looked at it, not unsteadily for his years and leaping blood, until he reached the front gate where the sunlight was flooding the road. A few paces to the right brought the greater part of the dale into view. The light was still so clear that High Moor and the surrounding fells looked rather small and bare, clean, newly swept; but already a noonday haze was beginning to trouble the bright fields and lower slopes and to add a quivering touch of blue to the heights. A little below him was the green floor of the dale, along which the Runner rippled and winked back at the sunshine. It might have been an outlying arm of Arcadia if it were not for the low grey walls that everywhere took the place of hedges, and a certain suggestion of austerity, unsympathetic to languishing Chloes and Strephons. Yet the road he was on, which ran away a little in front in a most artful tree-framed curve, might have been an Arcadian highway; and it would not be very surprising if the passage of the next corner, beyond the dappled curtain of leaves, landed him in the heart of a pastoral, perhaps in that Arden where they "fleet the time carelessly as they did in the golden world." He lingered over the quotation, which was a favourite with him, one of those queer fascinating remarks that Shakespeare put into the mouths of all manner of people—was it not the wrestler who had said that about the golden world?—and so contrived to keep you excited about him in spite of all that

schoolmasters and professors and bad actors could do to make you lose interest.

The corner turned, it revealed no green foresters or pink and white shepherdesses but the figure of Mrs. Belville, brisk, trim, and cool. She stopped, and under the shadow of her wide hat her pale blue eyes snapped at him as fish at flies. He saluted her and presented his little message from Lady Baddeley-Fragge.

"Where did you leave her?" she asked. "In the garden? I thought so. Did she talk about her flowers? I never knew a woman with such a passion for flowers and with less interest in human beings. Not that a few well-behaved William Allen Richardsons might not be a pleasant change after some of the conspirators she has to provide with board and lodging. I never knew her husband when he was not in some vague and ridiculous conspiracy. He always arrives just before a movement flickers out, and seems to serve as a kind of ornamental extinguisher, poor man! With him, it's a Cause; with his wife, it's flowers; anything but human beings. Not that they're not the kindest sort of people you might meet in a day's journey—but that's how it is in this country. Anything but human beings—causes, flowers, golf-balls, animals."

"I know," said Adam. "Someone once said that England is the country where everyone brightens up at the sight of an animal."

"Who said so, and when?" she asked, with twinkling sharpness. "Ah, I thought so," she went on, as his looks confessed the authorship. "Blushes

ADAM IN MOONSHINE

and epigrams are an ill-assorted pair. But I like you better for trying to pass it off in that fashion. You young men are beginning to make epigrams far too early in life. You will probably end your days with moony rhetoric, sowing your wild speeches in the autumn of your lives. It was better the other way about. Making epigrams is one method, perhaps the neatest, of commenting on a large experience of life; but it's not a substitute for that experience, young man. I don't want to see a Rochefoucauld publishing on his twenty-first birthday."

"I promise you that I'm silly enough yet inside," Adam remarked, lightly.

"And I've not a doubt of it," she returned. "How have you spent your morning? Have you begun flirting yet?"

He helped her with: "I never flirt before lunch."

"Nor after dinner, I hope," she said. "If there's to be flirting at all, afternoon is the proper time. Though even then, wisdom suggests a nap instead, or an old-fashioned novel, which you will probably say is the same thing."

"And even if I had wanted to flirt—and I don't admit to having had the slightest desire," he went on, "there's been nobody ——" But he stopped short too late.

"A very ungallant remark," cried Mrs. Belville, and seemed to give him a rap with an invisible fan, "seeing that you have already been in the company of Lady Baddeley-Fragge and myself. Oh yes!—I know what you mean. You mean that my two nieces have gone tearing round the countryside in that car

of Helen's, and that Miss Nina has not been visible so far, being occupied in her bedroom smoking cigarettes and over-powdering her nose. But have no fear. You will flirt, or be flirted with, before this day is out, or I am greatly mistaken in our pretty Russian minx. And you have the field to yourself, unless this Mr. Siddell, who seems a pleasant, featureless sort of person—he's down in the village, by the way, you may meet him there—should take to neglecting his duties almost immediately after learning what they are. If you were not here, she would make for one of the others, whatever their age and condition: she would not stop short of Hooby or the Baron."

Adam, who did not altogether relish these observations, put an end to them by asking who Hooby was, and learned that he was one of those rich detached Americans, with neither family nor home, who are now becoming rare and will soon have to be sought out in the pages of Henry James to be encountered at all, men possessed by an almost impersonal curiosity and by little else, without passions and vices, clean, naïve, vaguely benevolent, who take their spectacles and moon faces through the world as if it were one vast museum. "They have only to look hard at anything and become interested in it," Mrs. Belville remarked, "and somehow all the life withers out of it; it is petrified; dead as a door-nail. There's something strangely Gorgonish about them. And now that Mr. Hooby is taking an interest in this great cause, its chance of life is dwindling rapidly; he and Sir Arthur between them will turn it into a

ADAM IN MOONSHINE

little stone monument, I fancy, in less than no time. Not even the Baron can prevent that."

Ah, the Baron! But the Baron was a subject too sumptuous to be the ball in a little roadside game of catch. Let him wait, still with the bloom on him, for an ampler occasion. So, with a casual word about lunch, they parted, Mrs. Belville to the house, Adam in the direction of the village. There was still remaining at least three-quarters of an hour before the first attack on the sideboard began, and as lunch at Runner House was an informal meal, that period could be stretched, if necessary, to suit one's mood and circumstances. Adam felt inclined to give himself an hour's lounging along this Arcadian highway, during which time, if the noonday pattern of sunlight and shadow, and all the pleasures of hedgerows and sweet dust, permitted such inward searchings, he might go through the newly-stocked cupboards and shelves of his mind, and taste, tidy, classify the things that experience, whose vans had come clattering up every minute or so these last twelve waking hours, had left with him.

Two more turns of the road brought the village in sight, a grey huddle of roofs among trees, and before it a quarter-mile stretch of straight road that mounted slightly to the bridge over the Runner, which curved round this side of East Rudge. As he walked forward, the sight of two figures on the bridge, obviously talking together, gradually absorbed his attention. One of them, he was more confident with every step he took, was Siddell, whose tall slight figure and Donegal tweeds were

not hard to recognize. The other looked like an elderly rustic, and yet, even at that distance, there was something oddly familiar about his figure, although Adam had no acquaintances among the elderly rustics in these parts. Still, he had been here before, and memory is for ever troubling our eyes.

Then he saw Siddell leave his companion sitting on the low parapet and stride up the road towards him. Some instinct made him increase his own pace, and a minute later he and Siddell were within hailing distance of one another. The latter smiled and waved his hand: "Coming back to lunch?" he cried. "It's nearly time, I believe."

Adam suddenly decided that he was not, not yet. "No, thanks. I thought I'd just go as far as the bridge there, to see my old friend, the Runner."

"The Run——ah, I see! The river." Siddell laughed heartily, too heartily, at himself, and went on, quickly: "I've just been standing on the bridge there, talking to one of the local characters. No doubt you saw me. A quaint fellow. They've got a dry humour in these parts. So long!" And he moved off, at a smart pace.

The quaint fellow was still sitting on the parapet, and every moment there seemed something more curiously familiar about him. Adam walked forward, determined to have a peep at this local character who could take up the time of the brisk and business-like organizing secretary, who could remain so long in one's memory from some casual encounter that his figure seemed familar at a distance. As he neared the bridge, however, he dropped back into a saunter,

stopped when he had lounged up to it, looked at the shining water and then at his watch, threw a quick careless glance at the man sitting there and said, in the casual but affable manner of the tourist bent on rural civilities, " Good morning ! " The merest flicker of a gleam of triumph lit up the man's eyes. " Marnin' to 'ee, zur," he said, with all the effrontery of a bad actor, and then shambled down the road towards the village.

All Adam's thoughts went dancing and winking with the river. Hake, of course! The Inspector once more! Two hundred and fifty miles out, at least, in his accent, and completely, pathetically, ineffectual in a grey false beard and property hat, scarf and coat. There he was, going down the road, aglow with the thought that his pitiful disguise, his downright impudent " Marnin' to 'ee," had been successful, when all the time he had been just as plainly Inspector Hake as he was in the train or the inn. And this was Siddell's " local character," with all the dry humour of the district! But was it, though? Was Siddell very foolish or very cunning? Retracing his steps, Adam carried back with him to lunch a load of queries almost as masterful as his appetite.

CHAPTER SIX

THE ORCHARD

OPEN windows, streaming sunlight, and an easy informality gave lunch at first the air of a picnic. Sir Arthur, Templelake and the Baron were missing throughout, and so, of course, were Helen and Peter, but all the other members of the party were there. The picnic air served its turn in encouraging Adam's not unwilling appetite, but it soon gave place to a feeling of unreality. Every morsel of food, from the first mouthful of salad to the last crumb of cheese, and the shining ale in his glass were real enough; but there was about everything else there, the scene and the persons in it, a curious suggestion of the theatre. As he watched the successive entrances of his fellow guests, who seemed to pause before making their opening remark as if to give time for a little round of applause; or he stared at the steady blaze of sunshine, golden enough for any producer, the bright crockery and the dark panelled walls; he could not resist the fancy that he was assisting at the first act of a comedy. At one moment he felt like an actor, waiting for unknown cues; at another, and this more frequently, he was a member of the audience who had seen the play before but could not remember what was coming next. The result was that he made no attempt to answer the questions that had pursued him along the road, but looked idly at Siddell, smiling there between Lady Baddeley-Fragge and Mrs. Belville, as if he were some minor player. Such

questions now seemed without force and urgency, being merely part of a mechanical "plot" that would settle itself. He could afford to disregard such an affair of strings and pulleys: the drama, if there was to be a drama, would be something very different, far more personal, warm, secret. It would evolve without help from him, and for the moment he was content to look on drearily while he enjoyed most untheatrical viands.

Nina was there, in full bloom yet delicately tawny, looking as if she had just been created that morning. She could hardly have desired a better setting; in that company she was pure flame among sullen ashes, the flesh in flower, exotic, too, and all the more exotic because of her alien fairness, fetched from some garden far away, behind strange mountains. Once or twice her eyes met his and for a second or so he was lost in their golden mystery, but the smiles they exchanged brought to him no sense of real personal communication. Invisible footlights ran across the luncheon table. He was only seated in a front stall, catching her glowing glances as an object catches a turning ray of light. Nor did he resent the fact; it was enough that there was a lovely young leading lady; he had little desire for real communication with anyone, less and less as the meal went forward; and only asked that the scene should go meandering on, idly pleasuring his eyes. He even took pride in his detachment, which seemed to him evidence, not of an oncoming drowsiness, born of a hearty lunch and a hot afternoon, but of the truly philosophic mind.

THE ORCHARD

Meanwhile there was a dialogue, in which he took part as one throwing up an occasional word from the auditorium. Major Storching, who had stolidly marched with him through the meal, had contrived to articulate a question concerning one Colonel Stewart, old "Tubby" Stewart of the Fifty-Second. Was Adam related to "Tubby?" There was some resemblance. Adam, who always resented these resemblances and was positive that he was totally unlike any old colonel who merited such an epithet, swiftly repudiated "Tubby."

"And I'm very glad, indeed, that you're not related to him, Mr. Stewart," remarked Lady Matchways, who was delicately consuming a square inch or so of chicken on the other side, "because I never liked Colonel Stewart. A brutal imperialist of the worst kind. It was he, Major, who made that scene in my house with Isram, who was staying with me at the time. Poor Isram! He was shot afterwards; at Baku, I think it was. Yes, it was at Baku, I remember now, because Bolusky told me. Bolusky managed to escape and came to stay with me shortly afterwards."

Mrs. Belville leaned forward. "Which one was that?" she asked. "Wasn't that the dreadful hairy, smelly one who spoilt your Aubusson?"

Lady Matchways smiled reminiscently. "Yes, dear. I remember how you hated him, and were so frightened that evening when he cried and set fire to the curtains. Something to do with God, I think it was. Poor Bolusky was always so concerned about God. He could never either believe or disbelieve

long, and was always so excited one way or the other, I can't remember which, when he was drunk. And he was drunk so often. It was whisky, I think, that upset him. He had never had any before, and liked it so much that he drank two bottles the very first evening. My husband, I remember, always disliked Bolusky most of all. His manners were certainly rather dreadful and he was rather smelly, but he had a beautiful unspoilt nature, quite childlike, and was a great worker. He disappeared afterwards, and we never heard definitely what became of him, though Olgoff, who came to us to hide after the Bulgarian affair, said that he had seen him in Bucharest, where he was living in a back room at a baker's. I think it was a baker's, though it may have been a butcher's. It's all so long ago. Why, you were only a girl at the time, my dear. I remember you came with your mother on that evening when Bolusky was with us."

"Yes, I was completing my education," remarked Mrs. Belville.

"You were beginning it," said Lady Matchways, looking more frail and indomitable than ever; and then went on: "Olgoff was certainly a pleasanter person to have in the house; his manners were charming; but he was deplorably weak, and I have always doubted whether he really did carry through the Bulgarian affair himself as he pretended. Both Steck and Berstin—you never met him, I think; a wonderful man; he was sent to Devil's Island—refused to believe that he did. I'm so sorry you never met Berstin—the Baron will remember him, I think—for he was always my favourite, and I have always

regretted that I could not carry out my project of fitting out a ship to rescue him. I had everything planned, but we waited and waited, and heard at last that he had died after a year or two in that awful place. We had nobody like him, so thorough and resourceful, and with such an air. If he had not been at hand we should never have got our old Camden Town headquarters clear before the raid. We had only a few hours to move everything; indeed we were lucky to have any time at all, but old Mr. Malony, who kept a little tobacconist's shop near *The Man in the Moon*, where the detectives go, knew everything and never failed us. Well, Berstin and I—if you will allow an old woman to boast—Berstin and I did it all. He got the explosives away under some apples and sacks on a greengrocer's cart, and I saw to the little press and the papers with the help of a donkey and cart."

"Lady Matchways," Mr Hooby called out, gravely, with the air of one about to present a prize, "you've had a singularly roam-antic career. As I said last night, you should set down your experiences in a book. It would be a chapter of history and a roam-ance, and there would be a big call for it this side and, I promise you, in America."

"And as I also said last night, Mr. Hooby," returned the old lady with decision, "no memoirs for me. I still know too many secrets. But I flatter myself that I've fought for freedom, and I've enjoyed myself immensely. And now I'm helping to put a king on the throne, turning royalist in my old age. Dear me, how the comrades of the old movement

would stare if they knew. Madame Mashvays—for that is the nearest they ever got, poor dears, to pronouncing my name—Madame Mashvays a royalist! But if the spirit is to remain the same, I always think the movement itself must change, for different remedies must be tried against the old evil. Remember that, Mr. Stewart, and if you find yourself in fifty years' time still in this camp, depend upon it that the spirit in you will have changed altogether. No, no more, thank you. I've made an excellent lunch." A sparrow would have waited for more, but she clasped her hands, nodded amiably to her hostess, smiled with a sudden tenderness at Nina like any old lady at any pretty young thing, and closed the eyes that still illuminated that worn and fragile face.

Adam felt as if he had been dozing over an old-fashioned sensational story, merely catching here and there an odd name, a scrap of incident; but looking across now at the delicate aged figure, a sudden wonder took possession of his mind. And this feeling was so strong that it touched with fantasy every person present, the very dullest of them taking colour from it. Because the mild rambling voice of that old lady had conjured up in his mind so many vague but terrific images, knives flashing in the Balkans, bearded faces bending over bombs, carts loaded with terror creaking down dark side-streets; the other persons there, commonplace though they might appear when contrasted with this fantastic grandmother, did not lose but gained in significance. How strange, beautiful yet terrifying,

THE ORCHARD

it all was! He felt like a mouse with the colossally heaped table of life groaning far above him. Round that salad-bowl, nine gigantic Odysseys had come to rest; nay, were still clicking on, still piling up incident and laying on the colours of joy and sorrow and dream. There radiated from every person there fantastic and interminable processions, jostling troupes of memories, trailing back into Heaven only knew what places and dusty old years. And all of them, as they sat so easily there, were taking their stations in these pageants and would move along with the rest; all quite different; eight different Adam Stewarts already set marching along eight different roads of remembrance. Stealthily, as if they might know what he was about and suddenly scream out at his rude prying, he glanced at the dullest faces there, and marvelled. What night marches and peering hill-men were hidden behind the wooden countenance of the Major! Who knew what visions of embroidered Heaven and a red twisting Hell burned in that space behind the shallow front of the Reverend Philip; what young princes came smiling from the sea, and what dark clans went swirling down to death behind the faded eyes of Miss Satterly!

And then as suddenly as it came, this feeling of wonder vanished, leaving him spent in sympathy, a little drowsy and discontented. His one desire, now that they were breaking up, was to escape, to be alone for an hour or two. He would sneak away somewhere with a book and a pipe. But that might be difficult, for if there was work to be done and he was asked to lend a hand, it would be impossible to

refuse; the least he could do, interloper that he was, was to justify his presence there by a few tasks willingly undertaken. Fortunately, the more energetic and influential members of the party, he fancied, were all absent. He had no scruples about evading the envelope-addressing pair, who had that appearance of sombre righteousness which suggested that there were at least another two hours of drudgery awaiting them. Already they were whispering together and looking about them, not without a glance in his direction, and in another moment he might find himself doomed to spend the rest of the afternoon with a pile of stationery and the directory of Ross and Cromarty, with the further prospect of an hour in Caithness after tea. He fled upstairs to his room, where he decided to remain, with *Harry Richmond* for company, until all danger was past. Settling himself near the open window on two chairs, he plunged into that midnight in which Richmond Roy claims his son, but not without affronting that glorious chapter by an occasional rub of the eyes; and no sooner had father and son gone down the road than he lost them completely, being stunned rather than wooed into sleep by the strong air, lunch, and the murmurous hot afternoon.

When he struggled back again into full consciousness, feeling at first detached from his heavy cramped lump of body, just a shivering peering little ghost suddenly hustled into the great golden afternoon, his watch told him that it was half-past three. He looked at it suspiciously, not because he could not believe that he had been asleep for an hour, but

simply because, having slipped away from everything for a little space, he wondered what things had been up to during his absence. He did not trust them all at once: these big holes in the afternoon were rare and still left him suspicious. Undoubtedly it was half-past three in the garden below, now buried in a deep peace, though its trees shimmered in the heat and its banks of flowers seemed to smoulder. Still shivering a little, he stood for some minutes looking down, warming himself at the sight of it and returning sensuously to life. He would go down into the garden and smoke and dream in the shade over a book. But first, a cool splashy kind of wash, a change of collar, and one minute with a brush and comb, offered themselves.

Clean, brushed, very much alive in body though still dreamy in mind, he descended into the sunlight and felt as if he were at last entering that golden world where time can be fled. The very feel of the lawn under his feet gave him a rare sensuous pleasure; sun and shadow played round his uncovered head; the massed flowers feasted his eyes: the garden, the blue and golden spaces, the whole superb afternoon, spread themselves before him, with an infinity of delicate revelation, like a bride. His steps lost their first briskness for a languor stole over him, as if some sweet exhalation from the heavy red roses had passed into his blood. After crossing the lawn, he loitered among the flower-beds, explored the rose-garden beyond, and then noticed that behind the laurel hedge on one side there was an orchard. The right place had come

ADAM IN MOONSHINE

to join the right time. An orchard, of course, was just what he was wanting. He sauntered round the hedge, which had hidden the lower part of the trees and the ground from his sight, and then, when he had actually entered the orchard, his heart suddenly leaped to tell him what his mind had refused to admit to itself, that something else had been joined to the right time and place. There was someone, a girl—it could only be Nina—lying there under the apple-trees.

But all he could see was a hammock slung between two trees, and hanging over the near side of this hammock, roundly catching the light and at once becoming the focus of the scene, a leg. The world is now full of legs and even he who runs may read what tricks Nature has played between the feminine ankle and knee. Adam had grown to manhood among legs and was of a generation that could take them for granted, look them over casually. Young womanhood to him was essentially a leggy affair, whose entrances and exits were inseparable from two flesh-coloured cylinders, gleaming shins, variously and wonderfully-shaped calves. But this leg, delicately rounded in the sunlight, as if it were some strange silky kind of fruit ripening there, was different. It caught and held his eye, enchanted his imagination. Its lovely curves, sweeping from ankle to knee, were meshed in an exquisite light tan-coloured silk, and they suggested something at once delicate and strong, as soft and fragile as a butterfly's wing and yet as fertile and as indestructible as the earth itself, that something which is perhaps the

THE ORCHARD

grand secret of physical woman and makes her Nature's most astonishing and charming paradox.

While he stood there for a moment staring, half lost in a faintly voluptuous dream, a rounded white arm swung over the side of the hammock to complete the picture of graceful abandon. He walked forward through the long grass, whistling as he went so that the girl in the hammock, Nina undoubtedly, would know that someone was there. And Nina it was who presently peeped up at him and smiled back his greeting, a lazy, sleepy Nina, more golden than ever and more alluring in her slight disarray, with flushed cheeks and tangled hair. In a few moments she was wide awake. No, she did not mind being disturbed—and here she spoke truth for she was manifestly glad to see him—for she had just come to the end of a tiny siesta. He must sit down beside her and talk, and meanwhile she would beg a cigarette. In exchange for the cigarette she handed him two cushions which he placed very close to the hammock and then seated himself upon them tailor-fashion. She held the cigarette in her mouth with her hand and leaned forward for a light, and as she was certain to be rather unsteady in that position, it was necessary that his hand, holding the match, should come in contact with hers. And then when their hands fell apart and they leaned back to let an occasional dribble of smoke escape from their mouths, their eyes still lingered as if they did not know that the little flame that the match had lighted between them had served its purpose and was now extinguished. Really it was lovely in the orchard; a perfect afternoon and the

perfect place in which to enjoy it. They both, it seemed, agreed about this.

"You think it is safe for you here? Yes?" she asked with a rising inflection.

There were at least fifteen replies to this, but Adam, thinking it wiser to let his companion, who seemed to have the tuning-fork ready, set the pitch of their duet, contented himself with a "Why not?"

"Your name? Is it not Adam?" she pursued, accenting the second syllable of his name a little more than the first and giving it a piquancy in his ears. And then, after he had nodded, she went on: "The first of men?"

"The very first," said Adam, gravely. "He lived in Eden but was afterwards driven out, to work."

"And these?" She waved a hand towards the trees above their heads.

"Apple trees without a doubt. Perhaps that very Eden pippin." And Adam let his chin droop into his collar and looked up at her in mock dismay.

She wagged a forefinger. "And you think it safe for you? But the fruit, it is not yet—what do you say?—*mûr*, in maturity?"

"No," said Adam, "it's not ripe yet." But his eyes, still fixed upon her face, held no vision of green sour fruit.

"That is it. Not r—ripe," she exclaimed, trilling deliciously. "Then perhaps it is alright." There was the whole Continent, gesticulating its way through Anglo-Saxon, in that "alright." But Adam was charmed and smiled back at her as if they had just

THE ORCHARD

exchanged a dozen glittering passes of wit. This sense of being charmed, however, only floated on the surface of a fast-flowing current of excitement, a drumming tide of blood, into which the wine of the afternoon had already been poured. But they themselves were both floating together down some rapid stream, every glance and smile marking another league they had travelled, rushing towards some intimacy and yet remaining strange to one another, this very strangeness hurrying them forward. The fact that she herself was foreign, that this beauty of face, with its bright eyes and generous flashing mouth, this beauty of rounded limb, had grown up so far away and had travelled through all manner of fantastic places, completed the enchantment of the situation, transformed the two cushions on which he was sitting into a magic carpet and every word and smile he exchanged into a high adventure. All girls, at least all pretty ones, when you came to think of it, were strange and seemed at first to stare at you out of another world; but as soon as you knew them they were for ever collapsing into the commonplace. Here, however, so close to him, was one who was genuinely strange, whose very commonplace would be something fantastically alien, something Russian, half a bright toy and half a tragedy.

Thinking of her thus, he saw every possibility of communication between them, let alone warm intimacy, as a happy miracle. He suddenly wanted to seize the little hand that hung over the side of the hammock and was not more than eighteen inches from his own. An answering pressure from it would

ADAM IN MOONSHINE

be like a "Land Ho!" from a look-out after long weeks of sea and sky. Fascinated by this idea, he stared at the hand and noticed that it had trim but rather long pointed pink nails, two dimples, and a ring on the middle finger.

"Do you look at my ring?" asked Nina. "It is very curious, very, very old. Look." And she extended her hand, perhaps in order that he might be able to see the ring more closely. Under pretence of wishing to examine it very closely and steadily, he took her hand lightly but firmly in his. And there it remained, to his delight, while she resumed: "You see there—what has Peter called it?—yes, the coat-of-arms, the aigle and daggair. I will tell you." And tell him she did: a long rambling story that had for hero a superhumanly handsome and brave Georgian prince, killed at last by the Bolsheviki, and for heroine herself, with whom he was apparently in love; but what their relations were the recital did not indicate, though there was every suggestion that they lacked nothing in intimacy. This ring, of course, had been given to her by the prince, who, strangely enough, was not unlike Adam although, he gathered, an altogether superior being. Adam had every appearance of listening very closely to this chapter of reminiscence, this incoherent romance in which incredible persons and places floated as in a dream, but though he by no means lacked curiosity, he was indeed only playing at listening. Even if he had been offered the neatest of narratives, it would not have had anything like all his attention at that moment for this holding of her hand was the supreme

THE ORCHARD

reality, completing as it did a circuit between them, and there it was that his mind fluttered.

She came to the end of her recital. Her voice trailed away; her mouth was a drooping red flower, her eyes desolate brown pools; she sighed. "How extraordinary!" Adam exclaimed, and stared very fiercely at the ring and then a little mournfully at its owner, adding "I'm so sorry, Nina," though he was not at all sure for what he was sorry. But he gently squeezed the hand he held before disengaging it, and their fingers seemed to part reluctantly. Inwardly he was exultant. What came next?—what unknown rivers and forests, what temples in the jungle, what Cities of the Sun!

He offered his cigarette case and lit up after her, for this, he felt in his bones, might be a moment for tobacco but was certainly not meant for a pipe. Then, with a pitying thought for all the tailors of this world, he changed his position, throwing himself out at full length, though with his knees off the ground, towards and underneath the hammock, resting his right elbow on a cushion and his head on his right hand. Opening another chapter of reminiscence with a demand to know whether he had ever met a certain Marquis de Bel Amadou, Nina also shifted her posture, settling her head on her left arm, throwing out her right arm behind her to balance herself and then swinging out her legs on his side of the hammock. One of them apparently came to rest against his, for he could feel a light touch there, but he had not the courage to take his eyes off her face so that he might look and make

ADAM IN MOONSHINE

sure. The Marquis de Bel Amadou, known to his intimates as "Viki," was, it appeared, not unworthy of taking a place beside the Georgian prince, for he was a very dashing handsome fellow—and, curiously enough, not unlike Adam—rich, masterful, and of a fascination, imagine to yourself. As her memories crowded upon her, Nina's English gradually broke under the strain, and even if he had been giving her reminiscences all the attention he pretended, it is doubtful if he could have made of them anything coherent. Other figures, many of them not unlike Adam himself but, you will understand, of a superior richness and fascination, joined the Marquis in this shadow show, whose background was now Paris, now Vienna, now Monte Carlo; but at the best he could only see the delightful face before him moving through a vague but very rapid film of cosmopolitan adventures in love. It needed a sugary orchestra, velvet stalls, and the warm, sensuous atmosphere of the picture house to complete this frilly and scented epic of hers.

As before, however, his mind was really elsewhere, hovering round that absurd contact, which was now more apparent than ever, almost a firm pressure, though still not to be glanced at, and which kept him from changing his position again. It was ridiculous, of course, a mere touch that might be purely accidental, but it afforded him great satisfaction. Not that it gave him any sensuous pleasure, but it suggested an idea of intimate communication that made their talk so much elaborate pretence. Had it not been for that little pressure on his leg, the

talk, with its imposing names and places, its background of alien magnificence, would have left him crushed. As it was, this touch more than enabled him to hold his own; it made him the equal, if not the superior, of these rich and passionate Marquises; it presented him with the freedom of Monte Carlo and Vienna. Enriched by this casually scattered largesse, he suddenly felt that he adored Nina and was possessed by a desire to kiss her.

Meanwhile the afternoon was floating by like a great golden galleon. He glanced at his watch and discovered that it was after five. The last thing he wanted was to break up their little party now, but something must be said about tea. She was looking at him interrogatively.

"It's after five," he remarked. "Would you like me to bring some tea out here?"

"No, no, thank you," she replied, to his relief. "For me it does not matter. The tea is not good here. But for you—perhaps you would like to go?"

Undoubtedly she was adorable. He smiled at her with genuine enthusiasm. "No. I'd rather stay here listening to you, and looking at you, than do anything else in the world. Even though, you know, it may not be very safe for me." Easy enough, though he was annoyed to find that his voice was trembling a little. She smiled and made round, bright eyes at him, at the same time settling herself at full length again in the hammock.

"And after all," he went on, "it's not very safe for you—in this." And he waved towards the hammock.

"Why not?" She was all wide-eyed innocence.

"Because these things go over so easily." There was the least suggestion of a gasp in his voice. "One touch, you know, and you might easily be out." As if in illustration, he gave a little push to the hammock and Nina returned a little scream and flung her arms round his neck. Their faces came together; her lips parted and heavy white lids closed over those great golden eyes; his arm shot round her and then, mouth to mouth, as they flashed together over the rapids and through purple scented air, they kissed.

That marked a period: it was as if the afternoon, hitherto drowsing behind their back, had suddenly struck a gong. The kiss at end, they each drew a deep breath. Their eyes still clung together, but not without queries. What now? Recovery, as usual, was difficult, for if you are not parting then the only sensible progress from a kiss, a real one and not a mere pecking of the time of day, is towards other kisses or at least a supporting diminuendo of carresses. Adam was ready for more and was equally ready to pretend that nothing had happened, but anything between these extreme courses was beyond him. It was, as usual, the lady who recovered first and turned the corner for them both.

"You see, it is not so very safe for you," she said. "Though that you make for yourself. I think you are—flirrt, yes, a flirrt. But perhaps you think me very charming, beautiful? Perhaps with you it is *le coup de foudre*?"

But Adam was not yet quite round the corner. Strange, the way they did it. It must be the insen-

THE ORCHARD

sitiveness of the sex that enabled them to take the lead on these occasions. And now, faced with these questions, to which he was quite ready in his mind to give a liberal assent, he felt a fool. They hung weights on his tongue, which contrived, however, after some stumbling, to articulate that he adored her and had adored her ever since he had first seen her on the platform of St. Pancras. He even went on, now that his tongue was loosened, to examine and praise her various features, and all these tributes to her beauty and charm she accepted admirably, without embarrassment but with just the proper suggestion of surprise.

But oh, yes! she herself had noticed him in the railway station, she told him with engaging frankness. It was the resemblance to more than one of her dear friends that had attracted her attention. Perhaps he was the type she admired. And here the Georgian prince and "Viki" and one or two others crossed the stage again, but this time, he felt, so that he might give them a condescending nod. There really were resemblances. Remarkable! She had photographs, yes, there in her room, and he must see them and compare himself with them in the mirror. "But not, you will understand, with the others there," she added. "This is our own affair, is it not?"

"It is," Adam replied heartily. "You could, of course, give them to me after dinner. But the glass in my room is very small, not worthy of such an experiment. It's a very small room, you know."

"Where is it, this room?" she asked, after a tiny but by no means idle interval of silence. And then,

ADAM IN MOONSHINE

when he had described its position, at the end of the corridor to the left on the first floor, she cried: "What coincidence! There is where I am also. Next to you. Mrs. Belville, she is on the other side, and the others are above. Perhaps if—but, of course, no." She looked across at her feet, and a ray of sunlight came through the leaves to light up her faintly fluttering eyelashes, the downy curve of her cheek, her vivid white throat. The garden behind them must be filled with birds, singing on, as they were singing now, until the moon climbed up the sky. And who would have thought that grass could smell so sweet!

Ever so gently, he took the hand so near his own, and ran his thumb up and down the little yielding fingers. "That all depends, of course, on whether there's a good mirror, a large true mirror, in your room," he said softly, convinced that the Marquis himself, nay, the ripest eighteenth-century Bel Amadou, could not have done better. Without thinking, he leaned forward and gave the hand he was holding a little tug, so that Nina once more swung forward and threw her other arm about his neck. For a few moments her cheek, miraculously cool, was lightly pressed against his, and then slowly their faces turned until mouth clung to mouth and once more they kissed.

This time she disengaged herself quite briskly, rose to her feet and waited for him to join her. He picked up the cushions and they walked slowly up the orchard towards the garden. A step or two from the laurel hedge, she halted, looked gravely at him,

THE ORCHARD

and then, when he looked gravely in return, suddenly smiled, swiftly, bewilderingly, deliciously, and said: "There is a very good mirror there. But listen!—I am not certain. I will see. If I think you may come, then I will knock, so, on my wall, to-night. Then you may come, *doucement, sur la pointe des pieds*. But if no knock, then no, you must stay where you are. You understand, Monsieur Ad-am?" He understood. The night, even now gathering up its beauties, polishing its moon, spraying its honeysuckle, trying over its singing birds, somewhere behind the bright curtain of the afternoon, was to be hung upon a knock.

They skirted the laurel hedge, walked past those roses that had come blossoming from the darkness yet once again for Lady Baddeley-Fragge, and came in view of the house, that house of king-makers. It had not changed at all, except perhaps that it looked a trifle more foolish and old, turning a dim-sighted gaze, you felt, upon its own orchard, and probably past hearing a little knocking in the night.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE ARGONAUTS

DESCENDING for dinner, Adam found the house steeped in an atmosphere of conspiracy, and somehow not very successful conspiracy. The Baron was still absent; and nobody present seemed to have any straightforward questions to ask or any definite information to give. Eyebrows were raised, whispers were exchanged in corners; the drawing-room and the hall were shadowy with vague news; everybody floated about on a tide of rumour. There were, of course, exceptions. Mrs. Belville moved serenely from one group of whisperers to another, commenting briskly on all things under the sun in a voice and manner that made everything else there seem more shadowy than ever. She cocked a cool indulgent eye here and there, not unlike an adult visitor at a children's fancy-dress party. Lady Baddeley-Fragge busied herself arranging great bowls of flowers, which she petted and soothed as if it were they who were waiting for the dinner-gong; but now and then she would turn to her guests to give them, as it were, a cursory sniff and pat. Adam felt that he was being shown to her roses as a fairly promising young male, newly gathered, who, if properly watered and fed, might keep fresh for another ten years: he was sure they were staring at him.

Helen and Peter had not returned, and it was probably for news of them that everybody was

THE ARGONAUTS

secretly gaping. It was said that they would not be back for at least two hours, and there was so much vague talk that Adam, who felt that he had lost sight of them ages ago, could no longer think of them as two pretty girls but only as two mysterious messengers, instruments of Destiny, their heads cloudy with rumour. Compared with them, Nina, whom he had not yet seen since they left the garden together, was for all her fascinating strangeness an intensely real person, someone he had known for years. It was this king-chasing that made all the difference, spreading a hollow feeling of unreality. The whole thing was still incredible. When you came to think of it, this was a terrific historic occasion, which might change the whole history of Europe; you were waiting for an unknown king. The trouble was, however, that you could only tell yourself that it was, or might be, momentous; and it was difficult not to believe that what you were really waiting for was the dinner-gong. Refusing to be bullied into a state of excited wonder by a possible future historian, Adam conjured up a defiant interest in the common stuff of existence, the mere life-went-on, about which that historian would know nothing. Only, it was not common stuff any longer; it was pulsating, radiant with changing colour. But was it? Well, not here and now perhaps, but certainly just round the corner, last night, this coming night, to-morrow. That was the wonder of this adventure; no more common stuff of life; all of it left behind, a rotting mound, in St. Pancras Station.

It was not his part, as a polite newcomer, to look

too conspiratorial, but the least he could do was to steep himself in the atmosphere, help to thicken it; so he tip-toed round, raised his eyebrows, and whispered with the rest. From Mr. Brasure he tried to gather some idea of the lineage of this English descendant of the Stuarts, but that gentleman, jaded after the barren leagues of Caithness, either could not or would not tell him, and what was worse, really exasperating, tried to be jolly about it, as if Adam were a midday service for business men. While they were talking, Siddell, tall, sleek, passed them with a nod and the ghost of a smile, a curiously knowing little ghost, too. There was something odd about this Siddell, whose self-effacing manner sometimes seemed queerly mixed with an almost mocking assurance. Now and then it appeared as if he deliberately thrust upon you that bleached surface personality of his, those faintly pencilled brows and pale polite eyes, as a conjurer hands round his hat or raps his table, secure in the knowledge that his sleeve is full of ribbons and cards. It might be, of course, merely his manner as the only paid servant of the cause, that touch of irony sometimes to be found in the deft gestures and deferential voices of butlers and waiters. But how could he have been so completely deceived by the incredible Hake, whose rural disguise, in which he obviously delighted for its own sake, was so ineffectual that it became almost wistful, pathetic? Siddell might be ass enough to be taken in, yet there was something about him, a confident ring in the sound of his footfalls, a mocking gleam somewhere, that suggested he was not. Was

it not high time he told somebody, the Baron perhaps, about that Hake episode?

He had no sooner asked himself the question than the Baron, huge and smiling, entered the drawing-room, and immediately the atmosphere lightened and a kind of dawn broke round his nose. His little eyes went twinkling over the assembly and his hoarse voice fell upon their ears like a benediction. In his presence the whole conspiracy became once more gay and, somehow, credible: undoubtedly he was the big fat heart of the thing. "We move, we move!" he cried. "More assurances of support to-day. Some clan leaders arrive the day after to-morrow. We may expect his Highness any time now. Our two scouts have not yet come across him, which is as well seeing that they have been watched, but they have heard something. And I know definitely now that he has left for the north and that so far he has contrived to outwit an escort of secret service men. Yes, he has been shadowed; it's useless making any mystery about that. They are after him, and they are watching us. At last, it seems, we are dangerous; and every counter-move, every spy, is a compliment."

At that moment a slight noise at the door behind made him, and those, like Adam, who were looking towards him, turn round. There, standing at the door, exquisite in sea-green, was Nina. Adam caught his breath. She did not look at him, however, but across at the Baron, who stared back at her as he repeated, though without any special emphasis: "Yes, every spy is a compliment, though not, of course, any the less dangerous for being that, as you,

Miss Bersieneff, will understand." Hitherto rigid, she now made a sudden gesture, but the Baron went on quickly: "I mean, of course, as a connoisseur of compliments, and well-deserved ones too, eh, Mr. Stewart?" Nina accepted this with a slight smile but an unsoftened eye; and Adam's perfunctory "Quite" left him time to consider the odd little scene, which was not without a hint of melodrama.

As they went in to dinner, he could not help wondering why these two should seem to dislike each other. Surely the Baron did not think that Nina was a spy, one of those mysterious beautiful spies, flitting between Bucharest and Barcelona, who were always purloining somebody's "papers" in the old sensational novels. When he sat down, with Mrs. Belville on one side of him and her brother, Geoffrey Temple, on the other, Adam looked across at Nina, who was sitting between Hooby and the Major at the other side of the table, and saluted her with his eyes, saluted the girl herself and, if need be, Barcelona, Bucharest, papers and all. Her eyes answered his, swiftly, surely, withering away the space between them, turning speech itself into a clumsy, tedious communion, no longer to be sighed for; her glance was at once an innermost secret revealed and a caress; they seemed to kiss across the table. That was what was so miraculous about Nina, for under cover of the mere empty barter of words, or without words at all, she led you on, took you by the hand, while before you paths opened out through apparently impenetrable jungles, and shining cities unbolted all their gates. His heart warm with this

secret intimacy, his pride mounting high, he looked at her, and as he looked, he felt that only they were alive and that all the others there were so many stuffed dummies nodding and staring and flopping through some kind of hollow show. No, not all, for the Baron, towering beside their hostess, was still alive; and for all his strange antagonism to Nina, the only stupid thing about him, he shared her vitality and glamour, and there seemed to run between them some curious linking thread. Adam felt that in some obscure fashion the presence of both of them there was inevitable, that you could not have one without the other; and then told himself, though without attaining conviction, that it was all a mere matter of association in his mind. He looked again at Nina, received once more her flashing golden glance, and then heard from far away, somewhere at the back of his mind, a tiny knocking on a wall. He had tried not to think of that knocking, which may have been going on there ever since he left the orchard; but now it was not to be dismissed. He saw the evening in front of him, swollen, monstrous, slowly dropping minutes like lumps of lead, hundreds of them, before life began again with a knock.

"I hope, Geoffrey," Mrs. Belville was saying to her brother, "the girls have not drawn down the wrath of Scotland Yard upon themselves. They may be locked up now in a village tap-room, as Adam Stewart here was, last night." Adam paid no attention to Temple's vague assurance that all was well and the girls were returning, for that casual mention of last night suddenly filled him with wonder. Last

night! Last year it seemed, for this very day went stretching back in his memory, a procession winding over hills, like a round dozen of common weeks. But Mrs. Belville was talking to him.

"What were these detective persons like? Bullies? Or amiable, like comfortable fat policemen?" She posed the questions sharply, as if to rebuke him for his lack of attention. He made haste to reply that the two he had met were not unamiable, and went on to describe Inspector Hake. "I saw him this morning," he concluded, with an easy air, "and pretended not to know him. He was hanging about near the village, disguised as a rustic."

"Disguised as a rustic?" she repeated. "Are you serious?"

"Quite," Adam returned. "He had false whiskers and a stage Wessex accent that would have been quite unconvincing even if he had not been at least two hundred miles out of his way."

"False whiskers again!" She made a swift appeal with her eyes and shoulders to some heaven of sweet reason. "What is the matter with everybody. Is it the heat? Why, this Inspector is as ridiculous as the Baron, who says that he only ordered all those whiskers to please Lady Matchways, but really got them because he liked them. At any moment he may persuade all the men to wear them. As for Lady Matchways, in her craziest days, with her Boluskies and other madmen, she was never absurd as this."

"I think the Inspector likes them for their own sake," Adam remarked, musingly, "for I remember

a gleam in his eye when the Canon handed him the beard that had fallen on the floor."

"Canon? Beard on the floor?" If she did not actually throw up her hands, she certainly contrived to appear as if she did. "Tell me exactly what you are talking about before I begin to scream."

She had had the outline of his story the night before, but there had not been time for the rich detail, which he now spread before her, concluding with what he considered to be an excellent character-sketch of the philosophical Sergeant Rundle. And what, she inquired when he had done, had become of this person? Had he turned up again, wearing horns and peeping over a wall in an attempt to look like a cow in a field? No, Adam had not seen him, or even thought about him. What, indeed, was Rundle doing? Somehow he could only think of him still standing, with a glass of beer in each hand, in that room in *The Sun*, at Gloam. It had not occurred to him that Rundle was capable of projecting himself beyond the bounds of that room, that he might be somewhere just round the corner, still piecing together the "mosic" of this life.

This brought dinner to an end, and when the ladies had retired to let the men create, with the aid of wine and tobacco, their own peculiar atmosphere of mingled self-satisfaction and wistful dream, Adam set before himself the problem of crossing the desert of the evening. One thing was certain: the evening must not be spent with Nina or there would be a disastrous anti-climax. Should he hang about waiting for the return of those almost mythical creatures.

Helen and Peter; or discover what entertainment there was to be had out of his fellow guests, though it was likely that the more amusing of them, and particularly the Baron, would be busily conspiring; or should he stroll towards the village again in the hope of seeing Hake, perhaps in another disguise? He decided for the stroll. Though dinner was over, the day was not, and as yet there was no gathering darkness to shepherd them into the drawing-room and sociability; people were dispersing again, and as there was nothing for him to do, he would not be thought churlish if he disappeared for an hour. So he walked out into a world of honeysuckle and mown grass, blue distances and quiet dust, where already the moon's frail shell was hanging in the sky, a lanthorn waiting for its light.

The impatience he had felt earlier when contemplating the two or three hours before him, fell away in the open, and he contrived to saunter into a state of mind that had in it some touch of the deep peace that lay about him. He heard the sunset calling of the birds and those distant shouts, from men late at work or children ending their play, that carry with them over evening fields a hint of melancholy; he saw the light begin to fade and dusk gather in the far crevices of the hills; but there were still golden eddies in the river as it swept down towards the bridge. There he lingered, sitting alone on the parapet, letting his eye travel idly down with the water until it swirled out of sight under the bridge, its gold gradually fading, changing to cold silvery lights. The evening burned and sank above his head

THE ARGONAUTS

in distant flakes of fire; there came a breath, chill, aromatic, from the high moors; sleep settled on the fields; and still he lingered on, drowned in reverie.

He was roused at last by footfalls on the road. It was the Baron, bearing down upon him at a surprisingly brisk pace, an imposing figure swinging an enormous light dust-coat and crowned with a very wide-brimmed and altogether adventurous grey trilby. He was puffing away at a long cheroot that left behind it a visible trail of smoke. Even without speech, he seemed so charged with vitality, at once so massive and agile, so tremendously human, that immediately the very sight of him turned the whole evening into a mere back-cloth. Adam at once came out of his dim reverie, which was shorn off as if with shears.

The Baron saluted him with a wave of the cheroot. "Ah, Mr. Stewart," he cried, "do we dream while the hour is kind or is it merely an assignation? Can I command you? Good, then come with me to the village, where I take a last peep at the post-office. If I were less substantial and the post-office a little larger, I might be said to haunt the place. As it is, I'm for ever crowding it, and rumours of a frenzied demand for stamps, an orgy of telegraphing, at East Rudge, have flown round all the dales by this time." And he started off, with Adam in attendance. "It will probably be closed. Mrs. Wadden, the post-mistress, will have put up the shutters and folded her face for the night. She's one of those women who seem to button and unbutton their faces. But even if the place is closed, an enthusiastic client has, I

ADAM IN MOONSHINE

take it, his privileges, and I may inquire at the back door. I regret to think how much of my life has been passed inquiring at the back door. But a wire I expected is still missing."

He strode forward, alternately puffing out clouds of smoke and humming an unrecognizable tune. Adam, feeling very much the stripling, trotted by his side. East Rudge stopped and stared, or rather for the most part it merely stared, having already stopped for some time. The little post-office, which seemed to be entirely full of boiled sweets, was not shuttered but neither was it open, so the Baron, after looking at it for a moment with the air of a man about to open a small packing-case, excused himself and disappeared round the corner.

Adam sauntered on a few yards to the end of the street and found himself in the village square. The newest and most imposing thing in it was a stone monument that testified to the fact that several of the brightest and strongest young men of the village had been shipped away to be riddled and smashed, left writhing on barbed wire or turning blind eyes to the splitting sky. You might say that a murdered Archduke, someone never even dreamt of here, had suddenly come one night and tapped one after another of them on the shoulder, a corpse dealing death. Adam stood for some time involuntarily brooding over this stone and its names. Where were they, these figures shredding away in the memory, these names whose remembered voices and faces were passing into limbo? Did they gather still in this square they knew so well, a cluster of pale ghosts

around this monument talking soundlessly of the Salient and Mametz? Did they go peering through the windows of that inn there, with its gleam of gold above the open doorway? What was it? Ah, yes—"The Golden Fleece." A strange name that for such a place, one of those names and phrases that called up any number of flashing little pictures, of gods and what not, which somehow did not seem like mere tricks of fancy, patterns of foam on the surface of life, but suggested colossal realities, going on for ever, somewhere behind the complicated show of things. If you cleared away all this cluttering mass of stuff that seems to be life, you would find it there underneath, solid, clear-cut, enduring. Find what, though? Was he just happily muddling himself?

There was a step behind him. "I envy you that fine abstraction," said the Baron at his side, "newly come, as I am, from the back door and a barren quest."

"I was thinking about the Golden Fleece," Adam remarked.

The Baron clapped him on the shoulder. "Of course, you were. And I was thinking of the back door and a barren quest, as I observed. And that is how we stand, the little difference, eh?"

"It's the name of an inn over there." And Adam nodded his head in the direction of the gleaming sign.

"To me, in my present mood, it's the name of an inn anywhere. I'm for playing Jason, if you'll join me." And as they crossed the square, he went on: "A drink that will do good to the soul is hardly to

be expected, I imagine; but even whisky, which was intended for the lubrication of commerce and card-playing, or beer, meant for those who sweat all day and like to sweat all night, will serve to take the taste of disillusion out of our mouths. But wine, now; I could forget a thousand absent telegrams and half a dozen missing princes in a few glasses of good wine."

They looked up at the sign above the door and saw the fleece itself, as richly gilded as the sunset. The person appointed to sell all manner of liquors within, they read, was Z. Paddock. The Baron examined the symbol and the legend with relish, and then glanced at the open door, now hoarding dusk in front of them. "Z. Paddock of 'The Golden Fleece,' " he mused. "Why, here's fantasy for you. Here's a doorway that might lead anywhere; perhaps one of those moth-holes in the old faded tapestry of things; in you dive and everything's changed. Perhaps not, though. Paddock, I fancy, will keep us on this side of things, to twenty-four hours to the day, two and two make four. Unless Z. is too strong for Paddock. And what's Z?" And he sauntered in, followed closely by Adam. "Zabir, the Mohammedan mountain? Zadig, Voltaire's Babylonian? Zadkiel, the angel?" He was asking himself these questions rather than asking Adam, but in that narrow passage they resounded.

"Nay, there's no angels here," said a voice from nowhere. "It's Z. for Zedekiah. A Bible name, they tell me. They were great readers o' the Bible in these parts when I was a little lad."

Was this Z. Paddock himself? It must be. Adam could not see him because he was obscured by the vast bulk of the Baron, but no sooner had the voice stopped speaking than they had turned to the left out of the passage and were entering what appeared to be a deserted smoke-room. Paddock must have led the way, for now he stood revealed, a disappointingly commonplace innkeeper in his shirt-sleeves, a comfortable middle-aged figure with a large flattish red face, a bald head, close-cropped side-whiskers and enormous arched eyebrows that suggested a wondering simplicity. Apart from that, however, his face was entirely without expression and so remained whatever he was doing or saying. His voice was not without a certain plaintive strain, but this was always there and, for the rest, his flat tones never varied. He might be either a simpleton or a conscious humorist; there was no telling which he was from either his voice or manner. Adam seemed to remember rumours of an innkeeper somewhere in the dale, probably either here or at Semper lower down, who was famous for that rather grim ironic humour which passed for drollery in this part of the world. Was Z. Paddock the man? He certainly did not look very interesting, failing disastrously to live up to his name and his inn-sign, but all that might be part of the fun. You never knew with these people.

The only large easy-chair groaned under the Baron, who was busy lighting another cheroot. Adam drew a smaller wooden armchair to the other side of the little table and stretched out his legs.

Paddock wiped a few drops from the table and then stood, quite at his ease, looking down on them.

"Nah then, gentlemen, what'll you be drinking?" he inquired. "A nice drop o' lemonade?"

"I don't suppose," returned the Baron between preliminary puffs, "you've such a thing as a bottle of wine in the house, real wine, mark you, not sticky sweet port or sherry for the kitchen?"

Paddock rubbed his chin at this. "I don't know," he said meditatively, "but I rather think I've got a bottle or two that might surprise you." He left the room, only to return a minute later with two bottles thick with dust and web. "Madeira, this is. Old Madeira, older than any of us. Bual, they call it."

"What!" cried the Baron, whose nose had been hovering over the bottles. "An old Bual! Not another word before you bring two glasses, no, three glasses, and a corkscrew. Quick! before there's an earthquake or the next glacial age sets in or some hocus-pocus of Time and Space disperses us." And on Paddock's departure for the glasses, he grew lyrical over the find. "A wine stuffed with thirty thousand sunsets, mellowing for us, subduing its great heart of fire, when we were in our cradles. You don't know it? Then to-night you drink for the first time. They might well call it 'The Golden Fleece'; my boy; we're indeed on the shores of Colchis, and here are benevolent enchantments; Medea smiles on us."

Paddock returned with glasses and corkscrew and opened the first bottle. "Pour out, pour out, but reverently, mind," cried the Baron. "And fill a

glass for yourself." The noble liquor, rich, dark, but with gleams of red gold at the heart of it, took possession of the glasses as the soul might its body. Slowly, without a word, the three of them drank. To Adam, who had never before tasted that most sun-burnt of all wines, let alone such a rare mellowed version of it, this first sip was a revelation; it seemed as if the *Ode to Autumn* were sliding over his palate; the flavour of it and the deep generous warmth brought to his mind all the richest and friendliest, the most golden things of this world, so that he seemed to be drinking whole happy Septembers, glowing interiors by Rembrandt, Beethoven slow movements for strings, seas and sunsets where merchantmen crowded with sail went swaying and glimmering. By the time his glass was empty, the darkening room they sat in was touched with fantasy, shadows from a dream moving in its dusk and draping its walls with strange tapestries.

But his companions were talking. The Baron, already glowing, had inquired how this wine had found its way there.

"Did you ever hear tell of the Stookly-Gavells, a big family in these parts?" inquired Paddock in return. And then when the Baron had admitted that the name Stukely-Gavell was not unfamiliar to him, the landlord continued: "Well, this belonged to them. They'd nobbut a few bottles left, odds and ends like, and I took what they had when their place over yonder, Semper Hall, was sold up, a few years back. Aye, Sir Hubert had to sell up, not long after he'd come into possession, he were that badly off."

" I thought they were one of our rich old families," the Baron remarked. " What was it that brought them down? Drink? Horses? Speculation? "

" It were none of them things," replied Paddock, " but summat you'd never think of. It were pictures."

" What, did they lose all their money buying pictures? "

" Nay, it were them they had left 'em that did it. You'll have heard of Ockerman, the painter, that lived a while back? " They nodded to show that the fame of Ochreman, the great landscape artist of the early nineteenth century, had long been known to them. " Well, one of these Stookly-Gavells, old Sir Thomas it was, had helped this Ockerman, put him up at the Hall when he came painting in these parts. And the long and short of it was that this Ockerman, when he died, left hundreds and hundreds of paintings and drawings and such-like to the family on condition they'd keep 'em together in a room, let people see 'em, but never part with 'em. They passed their word they would, and they have done, and that's been the ruin of 'em."

He paused, and his listeners, fitting snugly into their parts, looked as puzzled as he could have wished, though he showed no trace of gratification. He took up his glass, and added: " Death duties did it. They had death duties to pay on all that lot, and these hundreds of paintings and drawings have been going up and up in price every year till they're worth two or three fortunes. And every time the head of the family dies, they have to pay on what they're worth, but can't or won't sell 'em. Next death'll mean

bankruptcy. If they were mine, I'd have 'em stolen, and ask a few thousand for leaving the window open one dark night.

He emptied his glass, and when the Baron made a motion towards it with the bottle, shook his head: "Nay, that'll do nicely for me, gentlemen. Another glass o' that and I'll be giving away all the other liquor I've got to-night. It's my business to see other folks in that state o' mind and not meself." He drew the curtains across the little windows, lighted an oil lamp hanging from the low roof, and retired to dispense humbler liquors.

"Our Paddock is of the earth," said the Baron, filling the glasses, "and like the earth is full of good things and is a mystery; whether foolish or ironic we cannot tell. I give you the king, the king across the water!" And he drank.

Adam waited long enough to remark: "But he isn't any longer across the water," and then followed his example, seeming to swim up through warm golden seas into sunshine.

"Happily not," returned the other, whole vineyards still ripening in his eyes, "though he was until a day or two ago. Not abroad, but"—and here he lowered his voice—"at Surbiton, where he was living when I first found him. These are, you understand, secrets; we whisper together in Colchis. He had been trained as a conjurer; and was excellent, too, with cards and eggs but still a trifle awkward, I thought, with the rabbit; and had already fulfilled one or two engagements at children's parties when I first met him, not, of course, under his proper name.

"I assure you he could not have had a better training; it has given him a manner, a presence, and he knows what to do with his hands, exquisitely dexterous hands, as you will notice."

"But won't people feel ——" Adam began.

"They would if they knew," the Baron interrupted, "and that is why I tell you these things as one Argonaut to another: this is news only, so to speak, in Madeira. Let us empty our glasses and fill up. For my own part," he went on, after attending to the wine, "I regret that the matter cannot be made public. The thought of the conjurer-king fills me with ecstasy. The conjuring is the last perfect touch. See how he stands. He represents an old, a gallant, an apparently lost cause, which, as I pointed out to you or to somebody at breakfast this morning, will always remain a lost cause, in the sense of being an imperfectly realized idea, even though it should be successful. If it is, he will be the most important person in the world, and yet he will still be nobody, that is, he will not be one of your bullies in office, with their feet planted in the middle of your back, but the personification of an idea. But that in addition he should be also, in private life, a conjurer, producing illusion within illusion, is to me the last perfect touch. Where else shall you find such a king, such an apex for the pyramid of true social and political life? We'll drink to the pyramid and finish the bottle."

The pyramid was duly honoured and the bottle emptied. Secure and happy in the very centre of the vast, friendly, sun-moon-and-star-lighted concert

hall of the universe, Adam sat and heard the noble symphony of life go sounding on, its moments growing in splendour. Here they were, he and the Baron, snug in the very heart of things, nourished by this divine juice. Undoubtedly the Baron was great, physically and mentally a great man, old wine in person, epical, looming. Could you say a loomer? No, and that was a pity. But epical, epical! And he, Adam Stewart, was in his right place by the side of this epical person; for though he might seem young, a nobody, he was, mysteriously perhaps but there it was, tremendously important. The Baron had seen it, Nina had seen it, and they would all, Helen, Peter, all of them, see it before they had done. But the Baron was saying something, opening the other bottle with the corkscrew that Paddock had left behind, and a damned sensible thing to do, sensible, too, of Paddock to leave it behind. But there, they were all very sensible men, all three of them; dreamers too, poets if you like. But no, not Paddock; he was just sensible.

What was the Baron saying? Adam raised his newly filled glass and the one glorious draught that emptied it suddenly and strangely cleared his head, giving him eyes and ears of extraordinary sensitiveness. Every surface in the room stood out sharply, in all its own peculiar quality of mingled light and shadow, just as if he had suddenly set up an easel to paint it. Every word his companion uttered fell upon his ears as distinct as the chime of a little silver bell. There was something more than dream, there was vision, with all its clarity, in this wine.

"To oppose, as many do," the Baron was saying, "unstinted service of a cause to the enjoyment of all the good things in this world is not to understand this life of ours. This service and this enjoyment are not contradictory; they cherish one another. There must be, I say, the over-mastering idea, steadying and finally shaping into a pattern what is otherwise the mere flux of things. That nourishes the cause you serve."

"It does," said Adam, very firmly.

"But without that, steadying and shaping," the Baron went on, filling the glasses again, "life rots, rots in the dish while we sit at table. There was a time, my boy, when I thought it sufficient to sit there, merely taking and enjoying what life offered. I would pass pleasantly from sensation to sensation. My snout was among the truffles. But it was useless, for the one sensation on which I could count was the very one I was scheming to avoid at all costs, boredom—and worse. The whole thing went maggoty before my eyes. What did I do? I clutched at an idea, a movement, cause, anything to serve with body, brain and soul; and threw the whole rotting rest away. What was the result? It all came back, sound and whole and lovelier than ever; the table was spread for me again, with art and wine and beautiful faces and whatever I sought out before, and there at that table I can sit and enjoy this life until the end comes." And he hailed this conclusion with another glass of Madeira.

"I drink to its perpetual delay," said Adam, suiting the action to the words. He was pleased with

the phrase, but a little surprised when he found himself repeating it after he had set down his glass. The repetition made it sound rather silly.

"But—" the Baron burst out, quite explosively, as if he had been suddenly contradicted—"but beware of escapes from life into service of an idea. You go, only to return. Remember that. Love of life, not of your own notion of it but of the real thing itself, the common immemorial pattern of existence, the structure that can only be built on the time-old foundations, must be at the bottom of it all, and not hatred of life, which you find in so many reformers and revolutionaries, who are all children of the Devil. Beware of them, I say, if they serve an idea but have no love of common things, if they work on because they cannot enjoy; they are vanity with a stamping iron heel."

"They bring nothing to us but the bed of old Procrustes," Adam chimed in, stammering a little over the name.

"A ripe image," said the Baron, busy once more with the bottle, "proving there is something to be said for old wine in a new skin. Yes, they are the sausage-makers to the ancient devils of Pride and Negation, and they see the rest of humanity as their branded hogs. That is what we are coming to, a division into pigs and sausage-makers. Don't be deceived by the pretended pure devotion and self-sacrifice of these gentry, as you see them in Russia and elsewhere, for there's no self-sacrifice in doing without the things you don't want, a happy leisure and friendship and the graces and ancient kindnesses

ADAM IN MOONSHINE

of this life, in order to do what pleases you most, the stamping of other people's lives with the cramped pattern of your own ideas. This is the very debauchery of power and pride. We'll drink to its speedy confusion."

Adam found that his toast, owing perhaps to its wording, put an end to his former condition of abnormally clear vision and hearing, for both sights and sounds now lost their keen edge and came to him through some blurred window-pane of dream. The Baron looked enormous and was still swelling, but his nose had grown out of all proportion, and now it seemed to dominate the whole wavering field of sight. Wherever you looked, there it burned gigantically. As there seemed to be no possibility of avoiding the nose, the only thing left to do was to stare at it boldly and meditate upon it. This Adam did, bringing the nose into focus after a short struggle and then pondering over its monstrous size and shape and colouring. He kept it fairly steady before him but not without difficulty, for like everything there, once it was fairly caught, it wanted to hurry away, to flitter about the room, a room that appeared to be stealthily abandoning its character of rigid cube. That was the lighting, of course, for these oil lamps played the most curious tricks, now elongating their flames, now dividing them into two or three. The Baron was still saying something or other, but Adam, still pre-occupied with the nose, could only make out that it was about power. Power, indeed! What about noses? A thought about the oddness of noses, the millions of them, their varying shapes and

sizes, the way in which they were stuck on the front of heads and went sniffing about, suddenly invaded his mind, and then, quite to his surprise, he found himself giggling out loud.

This would not do. The Baron might think he was drunk. He cut short the giggles, dismissed the nose, and stared hard at his left shoe while he tried to piece together his companion's words. "This other form of power, working interiorally . . ." Surely that could not be it—"interiorally?" Had the Baron said "interiorally?" Something very droll about that word. He wanted to laugh again, but pulled himself up and listened. "In the end, circumstance withers at its touch, withers, withers," the Baron was declaring with tremendous emphasis. "Or, if you like, it comes to shape itself to our hand. This power increases by its exercise. It leaves us lords of destiny." Admirable that; it summed up the whole matter, all that the evening had really meant, that remark about "withered circumstance" and "lords of destiny." He saw it all now. But there was something more, perhaps a grand conclusion? "We leave behind us nothing broken, nothing ruined, life sound and whole, and yet we conquer." And the Baron repeated, with a magnificent air of finality, "We conquer."

"Time, please gentlemen!" That was Paddock at the door; Z. Paddock, the sensible fellow. The sight of him, even though he seemed to waver a little, cooled and braced Adam.

"Time, indeed!" said the Baron, waving an arm and then taking up the bottle. "A final glass?"

Adam shook his head, on which too fierce a sun seemed to have been beating down, for already it ached a little. The Baron rapidly disposed of the remaining wine, and then, while Paddock removed the bottles and glasses, plunged tumultuously into what appeared to be a settlement of the world's affairs. When they arose to depart, he had arrived at a combined monarchy of the British Empire and the United States. By the time they had reached the door of the room, Europe was settled and Asia had put most of her troubles behind her. But there were difficulties about the Near East, Arabia and Central Africa, and these were not definitely concluded even when they had reached the end of the passage to the outer door, a passage that had lengthened out considerably since their arrival. The door was closed, and what with the problem of finding the latch and determining the fate of Arabia, it was some time before they opened it. When they did, however, they were immediately recalled by a voice behind them. It was Paddock. They had overlooked Paddock.

"Happen you've forgotten, like," said Paddock, "but there's summat owing for the liquor."

"Of course, of course," cried the Baron, with Adam his echo. "Why didn't you remind us before?"

"Well," said Paddock, very softly and slowly, "I reckoned you'd better settle Africa and Arabia first. It'll be thirty shilling."

Hastily, they each handed him a pound note and walked out into the moonlight, where he followed to stand for a moment bidding them good night beneath his sign, now changed into a silver fleece.

THE ARGONAUTS

They were all of them bathed in silver, but there were deep shadows in the square and now you could hardly see the memorial. "Farewell to Colchis," the Baron murmured as they turned their backs on the inn. Something about Medea and Madeira fluttered in Adam's mind, but any possible remark was too troublesome. These moonlit cobbles were not easy to walk on. The deep quiet, the silvered stones and the sprawling, idiotic shadows were oddly disturbing; everything was unreal, grotesque; as if you had suddenly been projected into one of those crazy German films. He would say nothing, and keep his head. The Baron too said nothing. Like men in a dream, they passed through the drowned village, silent, unstirring, at the bottom of its deep sea of moonlight.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE VENTURER BY NIGHT

THE walk back was like one of those half-hours spent on the borderlands of sleep, occasions when all manner of chimeras visit the mind and, having arrived too early to be accepted without question and too late to be definitely rejected, wander about there spectrally, now headless, now bodiless. Adam found himself possessed by a fancy that there were two nights, the one outside himself, cool and large and silvered, and the other inside himself, closer, darker, tropical, with here and there leaping and fragrant fires. One half of him, with pale little earth-bound legs, plunged on in this outer night, while the other half kept within, looking on at some dark festival by the edge of a black sea. It was all very confusing but not unpleasant. If it became too confusing, sleep would settle it, blotting out both nights. Sleep was like the rich velvet curtain at the theatre, coming down with a soft swish to put an end to things for a time, to let them sort out themselves. How terrible it would be if they just went on and on, becoming more and more complicated! But sleep was there, close at hand, if he should want it. He could lie down under the hedge there, just as he was, and make to-morrow arrive, begin an entirely new piece. And there were not enough people sleeping under hedges. Why should he not try it, and have done with this

ridiculous walking? But no, it was all too amusing; after all, you could sleep any time. He felt constrained to say something to the Baron.

"It's odd, you know, all very odd," he cried, "but it's wonderful!"

The Baron, faced with this simple statement, acted in the most curious fashion, for instead of replying to it, he looked Adam in the face, burst into a roar of laughter, looked him in the face again, then took hold of his arm and marched him forward at a brisker pace. Did the Baron think he was drunk?

"I'm not drunk, really I'm not"; Adam remarked, adding as an afterthought, "but I'm very thirsty."

"As you're young enough to stand the shock of drinking water," said the Baron, "that's soon remedied. I'm very sorry to say that the river is behind us, if you've any ambitions that way; but there should be a stream somewhere here. Listen!" And he held up his hand. "You can hear it gurgling over there. Go through the gate and help yourself, but don't drink the moon up if you find it there."

Adam found the stream, which was indeed liquid moonshine a little further up, but dark and moonless where he was. He knelt down in the dew and plunged his face into the swift cold water, drinking and bathing both at once. It had all the old moorland tang, the chilly sweetness of rain in high places, and when he had chokingly slaked his thirst and raised his wet face, chilled and stinging as if salted, he felt quite different. It was as if the tropic night inside him had been washed away, its fires quenched by

this moorland rain. As he returned to the road, he had with him a little picture of a crystal flood pouring down into the hot darkness and vanquishing it. He felt more at ease. The night and he were now all of a piece, both cool and large and moonlit. Was this what people meant by "pulling oneself together?"

The Baron was waiting for him, looking like a monstrous fowl perched on the shining bough of the road. Adam received a clap on the shoulder, and then they marched on together without a word. A few more minutes brought them to the gate of the house, that wonderful house. Adam could not trouble to think out exactly why it was so wonderful, but he knew that it was and that all other places were desolation beside it. He tried to imagine himself going to any other house but this, shudderingly saw himself creeping into some brick box of dullness, then hugged his good fortune. Here, in this house, things began, sprang into light, and did not tamely end as they did in most other, perhaps all other, houses, where your glorious day was looked over, roughly folded up and then hurried out of sight as if it were a soiled tablecloth.

"It's not very late," the Baron remarked as they walked up the drive, "but speaking as one voyager over the purple seas to another, I venture to suggest to you—bed. The alternative is the drawing-room and a deplorable fifth act of mere chat to the day's play. Better to sleep. Let the good ship, so gloriously ballasted, seek the furthest and most fantastic ports, dream or oblivion."

Adam agreed that it was perhaps best for him to turn in at once. They rounded the last corner and arrived at the front of the house, where a motionless figure suddenly started into life at the sight of them. It was Mr. Hooby, and he had shed his usual heavy immobility and appeared to be almost excited.

"There you are at last, Baron," he cried, starting forward. "I've been looking for you all over this place."

"My apologies for eluding you," returned the Baron smoothly. "Mr. Stewart and I walked down to the village, chanced to meet an old friend of mine there, and could not depart until we had swallowed him, so that now, you may say, he returns with us. But what is it? Great news?"

"Well, no, not exactly that," Mr. Hooby confessed in a lowered voice. And then, glancing at Adam and leading the Baron a little to one side, he went on: "But I've recollected just where I saw that girl in there, the Russian one, and I said to myself 'the Baron's just got to be told about this.'"

The Baron held up his hand. "Good! Then one moment, please." He turned to Adam and towered over him benevolently. "More business. Is it bed for you, then? Wise youth. Bon voyage to you and old Bual. Yes, if there are any apologies to be made for you, I'll make them. Good night." He did not turn away immediately but stood for a moment as if in humorous concern, so that Adam did not feel that he had been dismissed as he nodded in return and made for the house. All that he wanted was to escape from the others in there and to reach his room

ADAM IN MOONSHINE

in safety. At this moment he felt that there was nothing on earth so much to be dreaded as a lighted drawing-room full of eyes and polite inquiries.

As he crept along the hall, the sound of voices reached him and there was one quaking moment when he heard a door-handle being turned. But no one came out to find him sneaking in like a thief. The voices made him feel guilty, mean; yet curiously mixed with this feeling was another, very different, a kind of contempt for the people in there, chatting in their innocence, unaware of the shadow that flitted through the hall. Were Helen and Peter now behind those doors? It was strange, exciting too, to think of their being so near, for although they had been away only twelve hours or so, those hours had been an immense pageant, a solid history, and so had robbed them of common flesh and blood and made them as remote and glamorous as the Andes. Yet he did not regret that he was creeping up the stairs away from them, for he felt that they did not belong to to-day and would have been ready to resent their forcing their way into it as real persons. Nina, now; Nina was different. As that name sprang up, there came a buzz of excited recognition from somewhere at the back of his mind, a brightness shone round it. What was that about?

There was nobody in the long dim corridor that led to his room. As he closed the door, he felt almost triumphant. He also felt rather dizzy, and flung himself down on the bed just as he was, without even troubling to make a light. The room, indeed all that

side of the house, was in shadow, but there was bright moonlight in the garden outside and he had no desire to shut it out, to banish the night and transform his room into a little yellow box, by drawing the curtains and lighting the candles. He liked his room as it was, a little hollow dusky place in a quiet corner of the night. But though the window was wide open, the place was warm, too warm, as if the midsummer day still lurked in the house. Adam had long ago walked off the cool of that stream, and now he began to feel quite hot, so after lying on the bed for a few minutes, lying still in a swimming, swaying world, he decided that he would be better without his clothes. With an effort, he sat up; the world steadied itself; he took off his shoes, then rose to his feet and slowly, almost mechanically, undressed himself.

Undoubtedly it was pleasanter in pyjamas. He had had those clothes on too long; there was the day's heat and dust in them; to escape from them into silk and free air was a sensuous pleasure. Already he felt cooler and steadier and clearer in the head. The mere act of undressing should have doubly prepared him for bed and sleep, but by some curious chance it had left him indifferent to them. He was by no means entirely wakeful, though dreamy rather than sleepy, but he felt less inclined every minute to get into bed. Sleep would definitely put an end to the day, and now he did not want it to end. To-morrow, no doubt, would be still more wonderful, that being the way of to-morrows when things are at the flow; but that was not the point; to-day still mattered. There

was still something missing, something to be waited for before oblivion came crashing down and this day was gone for ever. He could not escape from this odd conviction, and while he turned it over and over, involuntarily he made ready to act upon it. He thrust his feet into slippers, put on his thin silk dressing-gown, discovered some cigarettes in the pocket and lit one, and went over to the open window.

The garden below, with its haze of moonlight, its honeysuckle breath, its deep quiet, might have been created by those soft opening chords of the overture to *The Magic Flute*. It was indeed the very landscape for Mozart, an air for muted strings and flutes magically transformed into moon-coloured lawns, heaped blossom, dark foliage against a mist of stars. There was at first a silence, not silence absolute, but a breathing quiet; but in a little while sound after sound reached to his ears, which went through their old sentry duty in the night without any commands from the dreamer they served. There was many a tiny scratching and rustling in the bushes below. An owl would go hooting through the shadows and once a dog barked far away. Then there were sounds from the house itself, sounds of distant doors and stairs, faint laughter, footfalls quickly dying away, and as a climax the noise of a door or window being opened below, a distinct cry of "What a lovely night!" in a voice he could not recognize, a murmur following after, then the sound of the door or window being closed. The life of the house, of the garden, of the shining world beyond, ebbed away

into a silence that might have been that of the drowned courts of Atlantis.

Here was enchantment, but Adam himself, looking upon it, felt disenchanted. He stared through the window as if at another world. Melancholy crept down upon him. He felt lonely, neglected, outcast, defeated by invisible armies in some incomprehensible war. Nothing but a faint but inextinguishable feeling of foolishness, a tiny buzz of protest somewhere, like an angry solitary bee in the desolated garden of his mind, kept him from those tears of self-pity that are the secret and sinful indulgences, the bottles hidden in the cupboard, of sensitive souls. Once past the turning-point, his tears unshed, he rallied and even turned upon himself in derision. What was he hanging about for, like a fool! Why did he not go to bed as everyone else had done! Impatiently he turned away, found the sponge, dipped it in his water-jug and passed it over his neck and face, which he then rubbed vigorously with his rough towel.

There was virtue in the rite, which may possibly have dispelled some lingering fumes of old Bual, for with the towel still in his hand he happened to glance at the wall, his wall—yes! and someone else's; and then he remembered. Nina, of course! That was what he was waiting for, that comedy of looking at the photographs in her room, that knocking on the wall. One part of him, busily splashing in every new bright wave, had forgotten the compact of the afternoon, while the other part had patiently, ploddingly remembered through everything and now had kept

the whole of him dallying. What was he to do about it? Had she been in earnest or had she merely been rounding off the afternoon's play in the best tradition of elaborate and naughty comedy? Still standing there, towel in hand, he revisited that orchard and flashed through its glamorous scene once more. The thought of her, warm, intimate, adorable, crashing through his melancholy, laughing away that lonely figure staring at the alien lovely night, took complete possession of him. His heart, now promised adventure, leaped forward to a swifter stroke. He looked at the wall, less than a yard away, as if it were some magical contrivance, as if letters of fire might soon blaze across it.

Would he or would he not hear that knocking on the wall? He could not be sure she was there, behind the wall; on the other hand, even if she were there, perhaps she did not know that he was back in the house, not having set eyes on him since dinner. Yet the thought of nothing happening this night was now unendurable. He knew that he would not be able to sleep now for hours, and he saw himself lying there, sleepless, wretched, all ears, waiting for a signal that never came, waiting until the unbroken silence was one vast ache. Sharply, as if to dismiss the horrid sight, he swung round to replace his towel on the rail, stumbled over one of its projecting feet and was pitched forward against the wall, that very same wall, only saving his head from a terrific bump by throwing out his arms at the last moment, so that he came in contact with the wall in three places instead of one. Even as it was his head received

a smart rap, but it was the shock and jar, rather than any actual pain, that jangled his nerves and left him very annoyed with himself. What a fool he was! Was he still dizzy or half-drunk or what? Damn the Baron's famous old Madeira! His skull still rattling, he sat down on the edge of his bed.

And then, miraculously, the wall opposite came to life. Tap! Tap! Tap! His heart fluttered and then pounded away furiously. But had he heard aright? Perhaps his ears were flattering him. He went over to the wall and stood there listening, shakily. Yes, there it went again, three distinct taps. If he knocked himself and there came a reply, all possibility of merely accidental tapping would be swept away. He rapped three times slowly with his knuckle, and now there could be no mistake for the magic wall immediately responded with three more taps. Breathless, he stood for a moment, his foot poised on the threshold of adventure, then very softly he opened his door, peered down the empty corridor, and crept out. A moment later he had closed Nina's door behind him.

She was standing there in the middle of the room, a finger at her lip. The closely curtained place with its single candle flame, dim, warm, faintly scented, was her casket. She seemed smaller and slighter and yet more rounded than before, seemed to shine through her loose green wrap, as she stood there lifting to him eyes and lips that had borrowed some touch of darkness from the surrounding dusk. For a moment he could not move nor even force a whisper, he could only stare. The room, almost glowing round

her, now flickered before his eyes, shook and trembled with his heart.

As soon as she whisked passed him to the door and softly turned the key, everything steadied itself and cleared. He looked round at her, in time to see a rosy heel slip in and out of a little green slipper. Then, his glance returning with her from the door, he noticed the assembly of candle, mirror and photographs on the dressing-table. All the properties were there. Suddenly he wanted to laugh. Not that it was very funny, but nevertheless he wanted to laugh so badly that he soon felt his inside shaken by soundless mirth.

With a glance of bright mischief and a whispered remark that he could not catch, she crossed to the dressing-table and took up a photograph. Adam tip-toed forward, gently removed the photograph with one hand and turned her round with the other. His hand remained on her shoulder, trembling a little, while he looked down at her face, now in shadow. There was, he fancied, something faintly whimsical there, an arch of the brows, a deepening at the corners of her mouth; and now his hand clasped her shoulder and did not merely rest upon it. She lifted her chin an inch or so, and moved or swayed towards him for the tiniest fraction of distance. It was enough. His arms were about her, clasping her to him; his hand, fingers deep in gold hair, was raising the head that was slightly tilted away; and now they were kissing with a fullness and passion the afternoon had not known, kissing with all midsummer in their lips.

He loosened his hold and drew a deep breath. Instinctively he cast a look at the candle-flame, unwavering in the still air, and swiftly her glance followed his. Their eyes met, to read the doom of their solitary light. Now for a moonbeam-haunted dusk, his lady there a glimmer of white flesh, her hair and eyes and mouth so many shadows! Adam took a step forward and stretched out his hand towards the candle.

It was arrested in very mid-air. There were footfalls in the corridor outside, and they halted at the door. Then came a thundering knock, so downright and confident after the stealthy little noises of the last ten minutes that it seemed as if a whole world were seeking admittance. Then voices, two or three of them, the Baron's amongst them: "Miss Bersieneff! Miss Bersieneff!"

Nina's eyes were like pin-points. She laid a finger on her lip, crept over to the bed and then upon it, made it creak as if she were laboriously and sleepily turning over, and sent out a drowsy "'Ullo! What is that?" The reply came, "We want to speak to you at once, please!" At this her face hardened and she seemed to bite her lip. "Al—right then," she cried, "I make myself ready." She flashed impatient eyes, accompanied by a frantic gesture of the arm, at Adam, standing there stunned by the gigantic debris from this irruption.

He awoke to life, an almost suffocatingly dramatic life. His business was to get out at once. But where and how? He might hide, like a man in a farce, but the idea of jamming himself in a wardrobe or under

the bed was repulsive. 'There was nothing for it but the window. He slipped across, pushed back the curtains and looked out. At least twenty feet gloomed between him and the flower-beds, but a fairly stout water-pipe ran down not far to the right. But was it within reach? Without so much as a glance behind him at Nina, he hauled himself up and contrived to sit on the sill with his legs dangling outside. Even when he reached the extreme right of the sill, however, he could only just touch the pipe with the tips of his fingers. And he must hurry, hurry! Could he kneel on the sill and then make a spring forward, grab the pipe and slide down? No, he couldn't! But there was some thickish creeper that came to an end a foot or two below the window. Could he let himself down from the window, find some support for his feet in the creeper, and so launch himself at the pipe? Lord, what a game! He swung himself over, hanging down from the window ledge until his feet found something substantial in the creeper, then he made a wild grab at the pipe with one hand. At the first hint of his weight the creeper gave way, and he found himself hanging dizzily on one arm or rather four finger-tips, but he contrived to clutch the far side of the pipe with his left hand and, swinging over in that direction, he launched himself down. Pipe, creeper, house and all shot up, and bump!—the flower-beds, hard earth, thorns innumerable, scattered blossoms. What a game! And now he was sore and dizzy, with one bare ankle full of thorns and his left hand badly skinned; nevertheless he suddenly felt ecstatic, perched on his thirty seconds of glorious life.

He had not time to pick himself up before things went mad. He heard a bush, about thirty feet away, make some remark that sounded like "Well, ah'll be dommed!" Then there emerged from it a large figure that came lumbering across the lawn. Adam had no intention of staying to meet this fellow, whoever he was. Careless of the thorns still pricking him, his thin, crumpled slippers and his soreness, he leaped from the flower-bed on to the path that encircled the house and fled down it, without knowing where he was going, but conscious that he was being pursued. Flying round the corner, where he went from shadow to deeper shadow, he crashed into another large man who made a grab at him that he contrived to elude by dodging under the outstretched arms and then doubling away across the lawn. He heard Number Two coming on heavily behind, and out of the corner of his eye, as he sped across the moonlit grass, he saw Number One, now revealed as a policeman, crossing to cut off his retreat. How many more of them were there? Would large men start up from every bush?

The policeman was not quick enough to head him off, and so he was able to dart through into the rose-garden. There followed a most exhilarating game of hide-and-seek, the three of them racing between the flower-beds, dodging round the laurel hedges, now hiding in the leafy shadows, now splashing through the moonlight. His pursuers were apparently as anxious as he was not to make a noise that would rouse the house, and so there were no sounds but heavy breathing and a thud-thud or a

rustle to mark the progress of the game. Adam's feet were wet with dew and he was somewhat blown; but he was loving every moment of it. A colossal spree! As he finally changed tactics and with a fine swerve raced for the drive, he felt he would have given anything to have had a football under his arm. Why not moonlit football? He reached the head of the drive and ran between the walls of rhododendron, gaining easily with every stride. Yes, moonlit football! Burglars *v.* Policemen. Drop kicks over the chimney-pots. After he had turned the second corner of the drive, he was so far ahead that he could not even hear footsteps behind him, so he slackened his pace and considered his next move. He had no intention of quitting the grounds, and his best plan was to try and hide himself in the rhododendron until they passed, or to double back behind the impenetrable screen of leaves. It would be necessary first, though, to find a place where it *was* not impenetrable.

A few yards further on he came to a little recess in the shrubbery where a curved seat had been smuggled in, and here the bushes at the back were thinner and offered some sort of entrance. But the place was in the light and would inevitably attract attention. He looked about him for another possible opening, and discovered one on the other side, almost opposite the seat but deep in shadow. Not without prickings and scratches, he contrived to wriggle through and lose himself in the musty darkness, and there he remained, half kneeling, half lying, for now there was no time for any further

move. Heavy footfalls, not running but still moving briskly, were sounding close at hand. He had only just been in time. Drawing himself up a little and then leaning against a low bough, he moved his head this way and that until finally he was able to peer through the foliage. He could see a yard or two of the drive and the curved seat opposite.

They were here. He held his breath. They stopped exactly in his field of vision, and he could see their large round bodies. One was obviously the local policeman. The other was in plain clothes, and as his face was hidden there was nothing to be made of him. Both were puffing and blowing.

"He'll ha' gone, ah'm thinking," panted the policeman. "Too light i't' foot for us, sergeant. What's next to do?"

The sergeant, who appeared to be busy mopping his face, grunted something indistinguishable and then would seem to have pointed to the seat, for they moved over to it and sat down with the air of men who had more than done their duty. The light was waning and treacherous, and though their faces were now turned towards him, Adam, as he peered through the leaves, could not see them very clearly.

"Well, sergeant, what d'you mak' on't?" the policeman asked, after a short respectful silence.

There was no reply for a moment because the other had taken out a little pipe, stuck it into his large face, and was now busy lighting up. Every movement he made seemed familiar to Adam; the face, illuminated by the match-flame, rushed into recognition; and the first few words he spoke were

nothing but a grand confirmation. It was Sergeant Rundle! The great man had emerged from the parlour of "The Sun," had descended into Runnerdale, to brood by day and watch by night, and had just been playing hide-and-seek with him in the garden. The shifting mosaic of this life had brought them together again. Oh, most excellent "mosic"!

"What do I make of it, eh?" Rundle boomed, very slowly and with intervals for the conduct of his pipe. "Well, now, that's a question. Of course, to begin with, there's things here that you don't understand and that it's not my business to tell you of. But you know, because you've been told already, that there's something queer going on here, and that's why I said I'd have a look round with you to-night. And what happens, eh? Why, something happens right off. This chap comes sliding down the wall, you tell me, and off he goes, helter-skelter in his bare feet and nightshirt, so to speak."

"It's a suspisus circumstance," remarked the constable.

"It's all that," Rundle went on, impressively, "but what I says about it is this. We don't know what this 'ere's about, this chap sliding down the wall in his nightshirt; it's a new development, is this, and it'll have to be reported to the Inspector. Maybe it's something to do with this other business and maybe not, we don't know, even I don't know. But what I says about it is that it just shows you how these queer things run together, which you yourself, as a right-thinking man with experience in the Force, for there's experience to be had even out

here, will have noticed. Start with one queer bit o' business, nothing definite, nothing to convict on, you might say, but queer, the sort that the Yard keeps its eye on; well, start with one o' them, and you'll find queer things all round it, just like this chap to-night. Everything, you might say, is fishy from the start. I come here just to give the place a look round, and right off I've got to go chasing a young fellow in his nightshirt. The same yesterday, when we'd hardly got started on the case, just landed from the train, and goes up to the little pub in the village over the hills there."

"Aye, that'll be 'T'Sun' at Gloam," said the other, deeply interested. "I did heer summat. What were that, Sergeant?"

But Rundle had evidently decided to keep last night's adventure to himself, for now he stood up and made a move forward. "If you hear anything," he remarked with ponderous solemnity, "you ask 'em where they got their information from and tell 'em to be careful what they're saying. The less that's said about this business the better, constable, you can take it from me. Not a word now about these doings to-night, which I'm going to make a report of to the Inspector. Your way's back to the village there, isn't it?"

The other gave a somewhat melancholy assent, and the two of them, without another word, went clumping down the drive. Adam did not stir until the sound of their footsteps had died away, and then he wriggled out to a happy release of free air and movement. He was dirty, tired, scratched and sore,

ADAM IN MOONSHINE

but as he made his way back to the house, the campaign at end and himself a young veteran, a blessed mood of content took possession of him. The night was fast shedding its brilliance; a wind was rising from the south-west and blowing away the last memories of heat and dust; and under a sinking moon and a cool glimmer of stars he walked in peace, walked home through the ruin of old wars. The long slow curves of the drive and the deepening shadow of its shrubberies were themselves part of the exquisite falling close of the day's adventurous verse.

It was past midnight and the house wore a shuttered look. The front door was closed and did not offer him even a handle to turn. How was he to get in without waking the servants, without having to bleat some lying excuse through an inch or two of opened door? Debating the question, he strolled round the corner and was there rewarded by the sight of the dining-room windows, where a solitary glimmer of light shone through the drawn curtains. They were French windows, and as he cautiously crept up he was relieved to find that one of them was still open. There was nothing for it but to enter through this window, and make what excuses he could to the people in the room. He pushed back the curtain and walked in, to find himself confronting the one person whose presence there would not be an embarrassment, his companion of "The Golden Fleece."

The Baron was standing at the sideboard devouring a noble slab of meat pie, and the fork he was

wielding stopped in mid-air when he saw Adam standing there, grimy and tousled, his dressing-gown covered with leaf and mould. "What have we here!" he cried. "Why, this is a worse gluttony than mine! I thought you were in bed and asleep hours ago."

"Lord, but I'm hungry!" Adam exclaimed. "Can I join you?"

"Sit down," the Baron commanded, and then set before him an equally large slice of meat pie and a generous whisky and soda. "Meat and drink, and then the story. I, too, have had a crowded two hours, but you would seem to have slain your thousands."

Adam fell to and when the keen edge of his appetite had been blunted and he had performed a little rapid censoring, he produced a not unconvincing though garbled version of the night's adventures, substituting for his visit to Nina's room a mere desire for fresh air and a stroll about the garden. He described in detail his encounter with Rundle and the local policeman, and then when he had done with that, being anxious to lead his hearer away from the dubious portion of his narrative and, like every man who has been lying, feeling that he ought to be liberal with safe truths, he added an account of his meeting that morning with Inspector Hake.

To all this the Baron listened intently and without comment, and as the narrative proceeded gradually transformed himself from the midnight pie-eating companion to the conspirator-in-chief. "You would

recognize this inspector and his sergeant anywhere and everywhere, I take it, disguise or no disguise? And they would recognize you, if they saw you in daylight? Good!" He thought for a moment, then went on: "I might have an amusing little job for you to-morrow, if you don't mind a day's walking. You don't, eh? You'd be only a decoy, drawing these fellows, or at least one of them, out of the way; but there may be some fun in it, particularly as you have a knack of falling into adventures here. You have, you know, just as if you were the hero of the piece, eh?"

"Perhaps I am," said Adam, who knew very well he was. "And I'm certainly at your service to-morrow, even if I've to walk from here to Scotland." And then he yawned and, stiff, tired beyond belief, struggled to his feet. There was only one of the day's splendid promises left now, and that was the last and perhaps the greatest—bed. He parted from the Baron at the foot of the stairs, up which he crawled with many an ache and wince, but in great contentment, a man of action, the mountain climbed, the wrecked crew saved, the invaders sent reeling back, all heroics performed, a man of action going to his sleep.

As he passed Nina's door, he was surprised to notice that there was still a light in her room, and felt a curious little twinge. He thought he heard a tiny scratching sound, as of a pen travelling rapidly across paper. Without thinking about the matter at all, he tried to make as little noise as possible, but he was too tired to control his movements properly

THE VENTURER BY NIGHT

and could not either open or close his door in silence. Would she hear him? He threw off his dressing-gown, and after making a brief attempt to clean himself, fell rather than climbed into bed. Would she knock again? As he slipped down between the delicious sheets, a cool wind rustled in from the night and he heard the first spatter of rain. But there came no more knocks on that wall, and he had just time to feel an odd relief before he sank into sleep.

CHAPTER NINE

THE STRATEGISTS

ADAM awoke to find that he was still the man of action of the previous night. It was disgracefully late, and he jumped briskly out of bed and went to the window. All the midsummer blue had been banished; the morning itself was cleared for action, presenting a grey arena for athletic heroes. There was no rain at the moment, but obviously it had been falling heavily during the night and there was still more to come, for all the earth looked sodden and a cold sky loured and sagged with cloud. Adam regarded the landscape with stern approval for half a minute, then threw out his arms and twisted his trunk in the manner prescribed by Scandinavian strong men, gasped through the coldest bath the house could offer—and if there had been iced water he would have demanded it—and rubbed himself as if his body were one vast blot on the morning's grey page. He had been wise enough to pack a thick tweed suit and a pair of walking-boots, and in these he now accoutred himself and clattered down to breakfast.

There were several people hanging about in the hall, the Major, Mr. Brasure, Miss Satterly and one or two others, and they raised a buzz when they saw him. Evidently the Baron, for purposes of his own, had dropped a word about last night's adventures. The Major gave Adam a knowing look and a bluff

word as from man to man; Miss Satterly and the others popped and simmered with exclamations and questions; and Adam, feeling a fool, tried to brush them politely aside with the air of a man who wanted nothing but his breakfast, and then perhaps after that, but only after that, another Troy to burn. At the door of the dining-room he ran into Sir Arthur and Siddell.

"Here's the hero of the midnight chase," said Siddell. Sir Arthur turned, gave Adam a little pat on the shoulder, and was about to make a speech when Siddell contrived, quite smoothly, to cut in with a question: "I didn't quite gather, Mr. Stewart—if the question isn't impertinent—how you chanced to run into those fellows in the garden at that time? Weren't you in your dressing-gown? So the story runs."

Adam met his colourless gaze squarely. "I couldn't sleep," he replied, easily, "so went down into the garden for a breath of air."

"A touch of insomnia, eh?" Sir Arthur remarked. "I suffer from it myself at times." Though it was evident that he did nothing of the kind.

Siddell stared on and said "Ah!" with both mouth and eyes. Then he turned to Sir Arthur with a brisk change of manner: "I'm wondering, sir, if that business with Miss Bersieneff disturbed Mr. Stewart. Their rooms were next to one another, you know." His face moved round to show Adam a pair of innocent questioning eyebrows: and then turned back again to add casually: "Unless, of course, he had left his room before it happened." Slyness oozed from the fellow.

"I think I must have done," Adam remarked, "for I heard nothing of it in my room," It was pleasant to achieve at least verbal truth.

Sir Arthur's restless movement and his "Quite, quite!" did not give Siddell time to do more than raise his brows again and produce a tiny ambiguous smile before he moved away, leaving behind him a heap of queries as pale and faintly mocking as himself. It had been a puzzling encounter, but Adam felt pleased at his own part in it, and walked into the dining-room as a man of action who could on occasion stoop successfully to the cunning of the intriguer.

There he found only Mrs. Belville, lingering over tea and toast, and Peter, who was standing by the window smoking a cigarette, very straight and boyish in tweeds. He gave them his heartiest "Good morning!" feeling positive that he liked them immensely. Peter's appearance had his unqualified approval. It flashed upon him that she was the supreme creation of this rousing morning, the very queen of its steely territories and tumultuous air.

"Here's the young man who has all the adventures," cried Mrs. Belville. "I may tell you, Adam Stewart, that my niece is quite jealous."

"Don't be absurd," said Peter, perching herself on the arm of the nearest chair, "I'm not a bit. But you have been awfully lucky, so far." And she looked across at him with something like serious reproach in her eyes.

"Have I?" It was a busy moment for Adam, who was beginning his breakfast and trying to look

modestly incredulous, vaguely apologetic and adventurous all at the same time. "Surely you've had as many adventures as I have? What about the night before last? And then I thought you had some tremendous ones yesterday."

Before Peter had time to do more than shrug them away, her aunt briskly intervened: "You and your adventures! You both talk like the absurd infants you are. But Peter here won't be happy until she has crawled under hedges for miles with policemen after her. If there are no adventures—as you call them—to-day, while you are both careering round the wet countryside, I shall be sorry for you, Master Stewart." This speech, closing the nursery door upon them as it did, brought both her listeners nearer to one another, so that they even exchanged a quick smiling glance of sympathy and amusement behind that closed door.

"We are going out, then? Splendid!" Adam cried in great content, attacking his breakfast very fiercely.

"Yes, I'm waiting for you, and thought you were never coming," said Peter. "I'm quite ready."

"Sorry I'm so late." Adam looked at his watch. "Where is everybody this morning? Where's——" —he nearly said "Helen" but then remembered, with a curious little twinge—"Mrs. Maythorn?"

"Oh, Helen's had to take Nina down to Lobley in her car to catch the London express," Peter replied. "They had to go quite early."

"I heard something about Miss—er—Bersieneff," Adam remarked, very casually, "and have been

wondering what it's all about." He caught them exchanging glances, noticed their confusion, and suddenly felt alarmed. What was coming?

"Well"—and Peter hesitated—"they found out, the Baron and Mr. Hooby and Sir Arthur—she was a kind of spy; they discovered this very late last night, and asked her some questions, and she had to go away at once, the first train this morning. And it was I who brought her here." She was genuinely distressed.

"Don't worry about that, my dear," said Mrs. Belville. "It was a stupid fuss, and, naturally enough, rather unpleasant. The fact is, this Bersieneff girl was not at all what she pretended to be. She was not a royalist or exiled or anything of that kind. The Baron and Mr. Hooby suddenly remembered that they had come across her before, when she had another name, somewhere on the Riviera, I think it was, and then she was a hanger-on to some revolutionary agents and a notorious and very undesirable person. Whether she was actually spying or not, obviously it was dangerous having her here, where she could pick up information for her friends or sell it to the highest bidder. Personally, I'm very glad she's gone. I had no idea that she was a spy or revolutionary agent or anything of that kind, but obviously she was a complete little minx."

"Oh, I'm not sorry about that," Peter exclaimed, "but only sorry I brought her here. But she pretended to be such an enthusiastic royalist that I hadn't the heart to refuse her when she begged to come. I met her in town and liked her enormously at

first; she had had such an exciting life and was so different from the ordinary dull girl one meets; but the more I saw of her the less I really liked her. She was always talking about men, and wherever she went wondering whether she would meet any 'attractive men.' I hate girls who talk about *attractive men* like that."

"Quite right, my dear, a very sound instinct," said Mrs. Belville, looking at her approvingly. Adam followed with a rewarding glance of his own. Peter was quite right. He, too, he felt, hated girls who talked about "attractive men," and pronounced the words contemptuously to himself, throwing them after a dwindling Nina in the back of his mind.

The wind, which had been alternately whining and blustering for some time, now snatched up a capful of rain and flung it against the windows. Mrs. Belville rose from the table and nodded meaningly at the blurred panes. "Well, it looks to me," she observed, "as if your adventure of to-day will be nothing more nor less than a thorough soaking."

Peter had clearly heard such remarks before. "What does it matter?" she cried. "I'd rather have sodden clothes than a sodden spirit, and that's what you get if you don't do anything on days like this. Besides, it will probably clear up."

"My own point of view exactly," said Adam. "On a lovely day like yesterday it doesn't matter if you do nothing"—and as he said it, he felt that he had done nothing yesterday—"but on this kind of day you must do something, must make something special happen, if only, you know, to keep

your end up." And two more signatures and scarlet seals seemed to be added to the Peter-and-Adam pact.

"All you young people are so anxious now to keep your ends up," Mrs. Belville observed, "that I can't help suspecting that you haven't much confidence in your ends. They ought to be able to keep themselves up."

The Baron burst in to take command. "Here you are then!" He rubbed his hands with astonishing vigour and enfolded them all in a ring of very rapid and very bright little glances. "Nearly time to be off, unless we're going to have a downpour. That's no good, but take advantage of the first fine spell. You know what to do ——" And he turned to Adam. "Go down to the village and look out for your man, Hake, or the other fellow, the sergeant, but preferably Hake, catch his eye, look busy, look important, let him overhear something if possible, and then he'll be after you. When you see you've hooked him, make for the moors, for the next dale there, Sillowdale, out of harm's way. If you can make an obvious chase of it before you've done, so much the better. A wild-goose chase, some would call it. Well, it's just the day for wild geese. But don't forget Hake's the man we want out of the way. You're both young and strong and supple, give him the chase of his life. Only take care you're not caught. I see you're both dressed for the occasion; but you'll need water-proofs, sticks, and some food. Some sandwiches in a rucksack, eh, Mrs. Belville?"

"Certainly they'll need some food. I'll arrange for

them to have some sandwiches and things packed at once." And Mrs. Belville departed at once.

The Baron nodded hugely and profoundly, first at the closing door and then at Peter. "You can count upon those sandwiches being ready." He dropped his voice into a flattering confidential whisper. "A Golconda of a woman, your aunt, my dear Peter. I've known her for years, and have admired and marvelled more every year. If only she would take this business seriously now, she'd be worth a round dozen of our conspirators there, worth an army corps, and with only two or three like her to help me, all them heart and soul in the cause, I would give you now the date of the coronation."

"I've heard her say sometimes that you don't take it all really seriously either, Baron," Peter remarked, quite coolly. Adam was abashed at her boldness, but the Baron twinkled above her lifted boyish head and looked at her with paternal indulgence. "Now that, my dear," he observed, wagging a fat forefinger, "shows you the limitation of her otherwise admirable mind and temperament. She reads me, as we all must do other people, by her own book, and that, excellent volume as it is, you may say has not enough words. Nor has it the right words. They have meaning those words, but not atmosphere; you could make a legal code out of them but not a poem. Now, for example, Mr. Stewart here, who has been reading me by his own book these past two days, has not enough words by him, but he doesn't make your aunt's mistake, and yours too, I fancy, simply because his words are the right words. Do you

follow me? We are at cross-purposes, your aunt and I, perhaps you and I, perhaps you and your aunt on one side and Mr. Stewart—for I insist upon claiming him—and I on the other, because you divide the substance of life into two, sacred and secular, serious stuff and play, and so forth, whereas we see it as one substance all the time, so that if one bit seems sacred, then it's all sacred, if one bit is play, then it's all play, eh, Mr. Stewart? ”

Adam agreed, and not entirely because he was flattered by the supposed likeness between them and by the appeal itself. Though his mind partly reflected the bewilderment on Peter's face, and he had not yet time to puzzle out the full significance of the remarks, yet there was something in them that compelled assent. He had noticed that division of things before, in his mother, for instance, and remembered being bewildered and oddly disturbed by it.

The Baron went to the window. “ It's clearing now. Better be off as soon as you can. The point is, if it's pouring with rain as you pass through the village, Hake might not see you or, if he did see you, might hesitate to follow.”

“ But why should he follow us? ” asked Peter. And Adam supported her with “ Mightn't he think we're merely going for a walk? ” They were standing fairly close together as they asked these questions, and the Baron in reply clapped a hand on Peter's shoulder and then on Adam's and wagged his huge head over the pair of them. “ My children, you are beautiful but not bright this morning,” he mourned;

and then more briskly: " You've not given this game of hide-and-seek sufficient thought. Consider the situation. We await a certain person who, we know, has set out for this place, but who is being, or has been, closely watched. I gather that he has now contrived to shake off the secret service men, detectives, or whoever they are. Their game is not to come charging in here, arresting everybody and so forth, because that would make too much fuss; their game is to prevent this person reaching us, possibly, too, to ship him out of the country, so that all our efforts are brought to nothing without a word of it reaching the public. Now I imagine they've not had time yet to blockade this house, for most of them are still looking for their man somewhere in the Midlands where he gave them the slip. Therefore, Hake, who is probably in charge here, must do what he can by himself. He knows the situation here, and he sees the pair of you, looking very concerned and important and so on, making for Sillowdale. You are the two youngest and most active members of the party. He will jump to the conclusion that you are meeting someone in Sillowdale and bringing him here across the moors, with all the appearance of three young people merely returning from a walk. That would be the obvious approach, and his mind, you may be sure, runs to meet the obvious. This will give us a clear day here, and we have some clan leaders arriving from the north to-day and some other friends, and, meanwhile, when Mrs. Maythorn returns with her car, I can go with her down the dale and south, perhaps to Harrogate, where there will be

at least a message. I rely on your youthful but almost satanic ingenuity to bait the line that will drag our friend the Inspector across the highest and wettest part of those moors. And now, make yourselves ready, my children, and be off, and good luck go with you."

He left them happily freighted with policy, and, as eye travelled to eye and smile answered smile, with their pact as companions in adventure finally signed and sealed. Adam bustled upstairs to fetch the small rucksack lying at the bottom of his bag, and then to find his raincoat and a stick. With these he was complete, and he returned to discover Peter awaiting him in the hall, also complete with a close-fitting brown felt hat, a waterproof, and stout little shoes. She stood there, erect, trim, outwardly very self-possessed but the concealed excitement delicately flushing her cheeks, a resolute little girl suddenly grown up; and as her clear grey eyes looked up and met his, he felt suddenly elated to think that they were to be travelling companions for the rest of the day.

"I'm quite ready. Are you?" She was very crisp, serious.

"Quite. What about sandwiches, though?"

"They're coming now," Peter replied. "You've got a rucksack for them? What about your hat?"

"Never wear one on these occasions. They're only a nuisance." And then he smiled, and she smiled too, but in the midst of her smile a sudden confusion faintly mantled her cheeks, so she frowned and looked a trifle annoyed with herself, as if she

had just done something foolish. It was one of those odd little passages that are over and done with in a second or so, have no apparent meaning, and yet seem curiously significant.

A door opened. It was Mrs. Belville with the sandwiches. She came forward, a paper package in each hand, and surveyed them both smilingly. "Sandwiches and some fruit, enough to sustain you until dinner but no longer, so see that you don't get lost or locked up." She handed over the packages and Adam stowed them away in his bag.

"Can you put these in, too?" asked Peter, and slipped in two coloured packets. "It's chocolate, and awfully useful. Last year a man broke his leg on a mountain and lived for days and days on just one packet of chocolate he happened to have with him."

"Just the stuff!" Adam agreed heartily, lovingly patting the rucksack before he fastened the straps. He saw the two of them eating that chocolate together in some high, windy place, with the curlews crying and the mists swirling round them and streams and wet rock gleaming a thousand feet below.

"You're nothing more than a pair of absurd dressed-up babies," Mrs. Belville cried, looking from one to the other, with the queerest little suggestion of emotion stirring in her eyes and deepening the laughter in her voice. It must have been this that gave her the surprising impulse to lean forward and kiss Peter. "Be off with you! I'm tired of seeing you both look so important, thinking about your policemen and your chocolate. And don't lose yourselves!" And thus returning comfortably to her usual attitude

of genial contempt, she hustled them out and waved them away.

They swung down the road to the village, a sharp westerly wind hooting in their ears, a watery sun and a thin grey scud above, and before them pale glittering fields curving beyond into blue-green sullen mounds of hill and moor. With a sense of happy release, Adam surveyed the vast curved edge of High Moor, over which they must pass to Sillowdale. Through the vaporous air, sending a thin drift of mist like smoke across the tops, the hillside looked enormous, as if it stood erect for once to the full height of its two thousand and some hundred feet, tightening beneath its thin worn covering of loose soil, turf and heather, the muscles and sinews of its ancient and enduring rock. He seemed to hear it, as he had seemed to hear so many mountains, baying out its challenge through the frightened air, and his heart lifted up to answer it. The old happy lust of conquest over grim upland leagues once more possessed him. He turned to glance at Peter, marching in silence by his side, and thought he saw something kindling in her face. He longed to share his present mood, or, if not that, to discover what was stirring in her mind, but now a sudden shyness descended upon him, just as it seemed to have descended upon her. The feeling of fellowship that the others in the house had involuntarily revealed to them had now departed; and out here together, they were once more almost strangers, proud, shy.

"I thought the Baron seemed quite different to-day," Adam began. "But then he seems different

every day, though, of course, I've only known him three days. But this morning he seemed more brisk and business-like and not so—what shall I say?—fantastic."

"I know. He does change," she replied, easily, "and sometimes he's very absurd and tiresome, and it's impossible to understand half the things he says, and you feel he's simply making fun of you. But this morning, when he explained things so simply and sensibly, he was at his best and I really liked him. When I came up here on Monday, I was furious with him—about the whiskers and all that sort of thing—and thought he was going to spoil everything, in spite of all the work he does, but now he's much better and we have a chance of doing something."

Adam was curious. "Have you known him long?"

"Ages. Father and mother knew him before I was born. But I've only seen him off and on because he's spent most of his time away from England. He made a lot of money very quickly years ago—something to do with a concession in South America, I think it was—and since then has been in all kinds of conspiracies and schemes, mostly abroad, and has lost a good deal of his money. He's been all over, and had the most weird adventures and met the weirdest people—men have all the luck, I think, though most of them don't take advantage of it—and if you once set him going, he can begin anywhere in his life and go on for hours and hours, just like the man in Conrad. I've listened to him for whole nights, and he really has had a marvellous life. But sometimes

ADAM IN MOONSHINE

he's very irritating and ridiculous, and you never know when he's telling the truth, he can make everything seem so queer."

"Why is he called the Baron? What's he a Baron of?"

Peter reflected a moment. "It's either Portugal or one of those South American states, Portugal, I think."

"But surely he's not Portuguese," Adam pursued, "even though he doesn't seem quite English?"

"Oh, no! He was simply made a baron after one of his adventures, as a reward. He's half English and half French, or at least part French. I don't like Frenchmen as a rule, particularly the little thin mouthing ones, who seem to lick their lips over you and are all scented. But you must have noticed that there's a special type of Frenchman quite different from the others, a big, fat, double-bass kind of man, that you can't help liking. And the Baron sometimes reminds me of that kind of Frenchman."

"I know," said Adam, though he was not sure that he did. There was, however, no time for more for they had turned the last corner and come within sight of the bridge and beyond that the village. Adam stared down the road, at the same time slackening his pace. "We had better slow up a little," he explained, "for now comes the only really ticklish part of the whole day's job. I've got to spot Hake and then somehow we've got to arouse his suspicions." He had half expected to meet one or other of them at the bridge, and he was a little disappointed to find that there was nobody there. "Let's hope we see

him somewhere in the village," he remarked, a trifle gloomily, "or I don't know what we shall have to do."

"Nor I," returned Peter, following his thought. "Obviously, if we merely hang about the village waiting for them to find us, and they might easily see us without our seeing them, or they might not be there at all, then the whole plan falls through."

They crossed the bridge and walked forward at a moderate pace into the village itself. The first short street offered them an old man, two women and a few children, but nobody even faintly resembling either Hake or Rundle. Adam found it no easy task to look here, there and everywhere, even into the windows as they passed, and yet not appear to be doing anything more than walking on in the ordinary way; and with every yard they covered his excitement grew. The next street, he remembered, was the post-office one that led into the square, and he braced himself to be ready for it when they turned the corner. His first glance was towards the post-office. A small cart stood before the door. Its owner or driver, an elderly rustic, was seated in the cart talking to a man standing at the door. But who was the man at the door? Surely it was Rundle! And who was that in the cart? Could it be Hake? Two more strides sufficed to convince him that it was, and that he was wearing the same disguise he had worn at the bridge.

In his excitement Adam grabbed Peter by the arm, and was about to whisper his discovery when she cried "Don't do that!" and shook her arm free of his grasp.

ADAM IN MOONSHINE

There is no outraged innocence like that of a man who has known what it was on other occasions to be guilty. Adam was furious, but there was no time now to indulge the feeling. "Sorry, but you don't understand," he muttered. "Don't look about you now." Undoubtedly they had been seen, and he had been recognized. He had just time to notice that Rundle had retreated into the doorway and that Hake had his back almost ostentatiously turned to the road. He whipped out his pocket-map of the district and an odd scrap of paper, and pretended to show them to his companion while he babbled of their mythical enterprise. "Here's the very place you see," he cried. "But how to get to it from here is the difficulty. Do we go straight over the top there? What do you make of it?" And hardly knowing what he was saying, he handed the map to Peter, who was still looking bewildered but contrived to carry through her minor part. A moment's more babbling and display of anxious and important looks and they were past the cart and its eavesdroppers. Ahead, at the corner where the street turned into the square, there was a lad lounging, and the sight of him gave Adam an idea. "Don't look back," he whispered, pretending to examine the map in her hand.

He stopped at the corner and asked the lad to direct him to Sillowdale. He was told to cross the square, follow the main road for a little way, then turn to the left down a side road or cart track that wound its way up the hillside and over the moor. While listening to these directions, he ventured the

tiest casual glance down the street. Rundle was climbing into the cart.

They marched briskly across the square, but no sooner had they turned the corner into the main road than Adam called a halt. Crouching down he peered round to see what was happening in the square, and sure enough, his little extra precautionary ruse had succeeded, for there at the opposite corner was the cart, and Hake was having some talk with the lad. Adam sprang to his feet, crying, "We've done it!" and hurried Peter along the road.

"That's why—I asked—the way," he explained, breathlessly as they strode along. "I thought they'd ask—what it was we wanted—and then that would confirm what they'd overheard."

"Are you sure they were the detectives, then?" she asked, turning a troubled face towards him.

"Of course they were! I knew them at once. And now they're after us, both of them, and everything's all right." He glowed with triumph, "Don't turn round, but step quietly and listen." There was a distant rumble of a cart behind them. "Hear that!" he cried, jubilant. "The wild-goose chase has begun." He could have danced down the road.

Peter could not resist either the moment's triumph or the infection of her companion's high spirits, and she glowed with him. "I think—you were splendid," she panted, for she too was breathless and they were hurrying down the road at a great pace. "You managed it—wonderfully." And then after a little pause, during which a fine feminine conscientiousness demanded that she should not leave the personal

relation unsettled, she added: "I'm sorry. I nearly spoilt it all."

He remembered then that he was very angry with her and told himself that he was not to be so easily mollified. It was, however, difficult to recall and enjoy his resentment, particularly now that there was so much else to enjoy; but he hastily told himself that for the rest of the day he would be the stern leader of the expedition, the cool, sexless, slightly mocking companion. He found himself replying lightly: "Not a bit. After all, you know, it was a really tense moment." Perhaps it was fortunate that they had now arrived at the point where the rough track to Sillowdale swept to the left to meander between fields and then zig-zag up the hill. A little worn signpost, the very imprint for the volume of rough weather and great upland walks, pointed the way. As they turned down this side-road, a casual glance behind revealed two heads bobbing up and down above the walls. Law and order were jogging in pursuit.

CHAPTER TEN

THE WILD GEESE

THE knowledge that they were being pursued, and the sight of the green track, grey-edged with low stone walls, stretching before them, winding up and up until it was lost in the trailing mists, sent their spirits soaring. Involuntarily they increased their pace. The sun had now withdrawn altogether and there was a gathering menace in the sky. The wind howled down the narrow channel at the head of the valley. There was an occasional lash of rain, chill stinging drops, and bleak salty air came swirling down between the showers. As he swung along, Adam held up his head and sniffed in delight, and there came back to him, in one of those oddly poignant flashes, a remembrance of himself trying to capture this very scent, the wet moorland smell, only two days before, standing in St. Pancras or in the corridor of the train, a dusty blue day all round him. Peter had been there, just before or just afterwards, grey eyes looking up at the carriage window. And now she was here, stepping out beside him! He looked at her as if to reassure himself that she really was there, and then he looked again, this time because he was wondering how she was feeling about the adventure now in the face of cold wind and rain. He told himself that everybody was not enraptured at the mere thought of wet rocks and mist and sodden leagues of moorland.

She read the thought behind his glance. "Don't worry," she said, a trifle shortly. "I'm loving it."

"So am I. Do you really like—this?" And he waved his stick at the vague majesty of hill and cloud.

"I adore it," she returned promptly; and then thawing in the warmth of a genuine enthusiasm, she continued: "It's the only kind of country I really do like, and this is the best kind of day for it, I think. Father and I have come up here, not just here, you know, but to the Dales and the Lakes, for years and years, and we've walked miles on days worse than this, sometimes in the snow."

Of course he ought to have known that she felt like that about it; she was so perfectly set in the scene and the day; and the thought warmed him towards her. "Splendid! I'm glad of that," he cried, without patronage. "This country gives me a thrill I never get from the fat settled land in the southern counties."

"I know. I hate that country. It's too fat and soft, not real country at all."

"No, it's not; just one big sleepy farm and garden, with everything tamed for centuries, touching its hat at you," he added in a fine fierce growl.

"Full of pink little curates," she went on, "and sloppy novelists and tea-parties and tennis and colonels' widows and maiden aunts ——"

"Stringy old snobs who spend all their time trying to cheat at bridge ——"

This duet, such a safe and delightful affair that they did not end it until their contemptuous cata-

loguing had obviously passed the most indulgent bounds, carried them half-way up the hill, with the cart still in attendance not more than six or seven hundred yards behind. Hake was obviously making no attempt to overtake them, though it was doubtful if he really possessed any advantage on that rough, winding track; but he might soon try to catch up, or on the other hand, faced with such threatening weather, he might possibly abandon the pursuit. Feeling hungry, Adam looked at his watch and saw that it was nearly one o'clock. "I'll tell you what," he began, after a pause, "I think we'll change our tactics." Peter, too, it seemed, had thought of that. "They might give it up," she remarked, nodding at the rolling black clouds. "Why not pretend now to notice that we're being followed." That was Adam's notion too, and they plotted together enthusiastically. A little further up, they would stop, point to the cart, "register alarm," as Peter put it, and then make hastily for the open moor in the hope of finding some path that would lead them safely past rock and morass over the top into Sillowdale.

They had hardly congratulated themselves on the plan of action when they noticed, to the right a little way in front, a gap in the wall and beyond it a faint narrow track that went sharply up the hill. Opposite this gap they halted and went through their agreed performance with the most elaborate and satisfying gestures, after which they made what speed they could away from the road. Their rate of progress, however, was far slower on the steep, spongy ground they were treading now, and they seemed hardly

more than two hundred yards from the gap when they turned and saw the cart stopping there. After a consultation, one figure jumped down, clearly with the intention of following them on foot, and the cart rumbled forward up the main track. All excitement, they waited no longer.

"Now for the wild geese——" Adam cried, swinging round.

"In flight." And Peter, shaking the raindrops from her little hat, laughed and broke delightedly into a short run, like a slender wild thing. Adam caught up to her, and together they clambered up the slope on the rapidly vanishing track, sometimes slipping on the treacherous surface, sometimes catching a foot in the innumerable spongy holes, sometimes sliding on a wet stone. But they were gaining with every stride. The clouds swept down to meet them, and very soon they had lost all sight of the summit before them and of the track behind. They moved in a little hollow ghostly place in the mist, and there was no sound but the drip-drip of water and the far mournful crying of the birds. All direction was obliterated; they could only make for the steepest practicable slope within sight; and once they were badly bogged and had to pull squelching shoes out of the brown slime and then jump from one hard tuft to the next until they reached firm ground again.

At last there were no more slopes in view and they seemed to have reached the summit. Slowly now, and very quietly, shadows in a high ghostly place they walked on level ground. Then Adam, who was

beginning to feel chilled, a trifle tired and very hungry, stopped and held up his hand. They listened for a moment. "He's lost us, and himself too, I imagine," Adam almost whispered. "And incidentally, we don't know which way to go. I wish I had a compass." Peter fumbled in the pocket of her waterproof and very surprisingly produced from it a tiny compass, which they examined together. "What's our direction?" she whispered. There was no necessity to whisper, but instinctively they had lowered their voices in this spectral world. "Anything northish," Adam replied, "so that we don't go back on our tracks. We'll head due north, straight for Sillowdale." Still blanketed in mist, they crossed what appeared to be the plateau of the summit, and then found themselves at the edge of a gradual descent, very boggy and thick-sown in places with small sharp rocks. As they stumbled on, the mist thinned so that they could see a little further ahead, but the valley below was not visible yet, and they descended into a mystery.

"Lord! but I'm hungry," Adam cried at last, and it was as if his confession had given a signal of release to Peter, for she immediately admitted that she was both hungry and tired. It seemed senseless to hurry away any longer from a pursuer who had completely vanished, who might have been left in another world, so they agreed to call a halt. A rude stone shelter, probably used by shepherds, suddenly appeared a little way below to the right, and they flung themselves down on the floor inside and ravened their sandwiches and fruit. It was not until Adam

had filled a pipe and Peter had lit a cigarette that they began to talk, and even then it was only in fragmentary remarks. A triumphant peace came with the first few puffs of smoke. An air of achievement filled the queer little place. From time to time, they regarded one another calmly and happily, feeling sure of themselves in a deep companionship that only turned shy and treacherous when it came up to the surface of words.

"It's much clearer," Peter remarked, looking out and throwing away her cigarette. "What's next?"

Adam struggled to his feet, chilled, damp and rather stiff. "Oh, Sillowdale, don't you think? We said we'd go there and we will. Anyhow, it'll be safer if Hake or the other fellow is still prowling around."

"For that matter, he might have caught us here."

"I know. But he's probably lost up there, or half-way back, cursing our heads off. Let's be going, shall we?" And he slung his rucksack over his shoulder and marched out. They could see right down into the valley now, but it was obviously only a part of the whole dale, just a green vacant length between two spurs of the hill they were descending. A sudden weak shaft of sunlight set it glittering here and there, and at last showed them a few isolated farms in the distance, and immediately below, perhaps a mile and a half away, a house of some kind. This offered them an objective, and being aimless now they accepted it, knowing that it is dull work walking towards nothing. "Besides," Peter added, "there'll probably be a path going down to it." To

her delight there was, and they were soon striding and slipping and hopping down it, with the house ever in view.

"There's no sign of that main track," Adam remarked, staring about him. "I wonder what became of the cart?"

"I'm beginning to believe there never was a cart or detective or anything. I feel I've dreamt them, and now I'm just having the usual long scrambling walk, the usual jolly wet exploration." She was silent a moment, then resumed with a more meditative air. "But no, when I think of it, the adventure part has made a tremendous lot of difference. It's not really been the main thing, but it's rounded everything off. It's what I've always wanted to happen in places like this, you know; a romantic pursuit, with me on the lawless side."

Adam was interested. "I was feeling that, too, particularly when we first got into the mist. It was an escape all round. I felt as if Hake and Rundle were part, only this time a very active and conscious part, of something I've always escaped from, or wanted to escape from, when I came to these places."

"The places themselves feel it and help you, I think," she went on slowly, thinking it out and producing the actual words rather shyly. "Helen—my cousin, Mrs. Maythorn, you know—always tells me I'm a barbarian, and perhaps I am. She's tremendously civilized, accepts all the limitations and works within them, and does better because they are there, if you see what I mean, like a poet with a

sonnet. I want to escape from them all, and this untamed kind of country that won't be settled and neatly marked out, helps enormously. Look at the way, for instance, sex drops on you as soon as you go down there. That's one of the things—and it's a very complicated one—that you don't have to trouble yourself about, but I have, even now, for all their talk. There's a place marked out for me, all snug and comfortable, no doubt, down there, and even if I refuse to fit in, if I struggle out, I find myself in another; if you refuse to become one kind of girl, you become another kind, always some kind. And try as you will, you can't escape, at least not down there, sitting about. First they say you're this or that type, and then you find you are . . .”

Her final words were torn out of her mouth and sent shrieking down the valley by a great gust of wind. Immense black clouds that had been piled up in the western sky now bore down upon the hill. The wind suddenly dropped; a few birds went darkly clamouring through the brooding hollow of space; there was a moment's trembling quiet; a heavy splash here and there; and then the steely obliterating torrent. Drenched and blind, Adam and Peter ran and slipped and staggered down a track that was rapidly becoming a rushing mountain stream. “We'll have to get down there,” Adam bellowed, pointing in the direction of the house below, hardly visible now through the quivering white shafts of rain. Peter nodded, ran forward incautiously and nearly fell headlong, only just saving herself by throwing all her weight on one muddied

arm. Adam rushed up to give her a hand, but she laughed him away and contrived to rise and join him, slightly limping as she moved on again. "You're limping," he roared, fatuously, though with genuine concern in his glance. She made an impatient little grimace, shook her head, sending a shower of rain-drops whirling, and hurried along pushing back wet strands of hair and dabbing her streaming face with a tiny handkerchief. Adam was similarly engaged, pressing his hands down over his soaked bare head like a man just out of water. They could hardly see, and went slipping at every stride, but it was not long before they were almost at the bottom of the hill and on easier, firmer ground.

By this time it was lighter, and the first torrential sheets of water had dwindled and passed into an ordinary steady downpour. They could see the house very plainly now. It was larger than the usual dalesman's cottage, a solid square stone building with one side fronting the hill without any intervening wall or garden space. This was obviously the back, and there were outhouses and some sort of garden at the other side. As they came up to it, their pace gradually slackened until finally, debating what to do, they came to a halt not more than a few steps from the nearest window. There were no signs of life about the place, no hint of warmth and welcome of it stood there, deep in a lost world of rain and little old and grey and blind-eyed.

Adam regarded it dubiously, and then per of the and down the valley. "We'd better ask if don't you think?"

unstirring

ADAM IN MOONSHINE

"Of course." Peter shook herself, shivering a little. "Surely they'll let us sit by the fire, if there is one, and dry our things. And we could probably get some tea. Couldn't you drink some boiling-hot tea?"

"Gallons of it," Adam replied, but without enthusiasm. "I doubt though if we shall get any. Somehow this place doesn't look like tea."

"No, it doesn't look very cosy," she admitted. And then, after a little pause: "In fact, it looks—rather sinister."

Adam had been glancing up and down the dale again, and threw out: "Perhaps there's no one there; houses with no one in them often look like that."

"Oh, yes, there's someone in," Peter remarked, quite calmly, "because I've just caught a glimpse of a face at that window, the nearer one on the first floor. I noticed a curtain shaking first, and then a vague face. They've been watching us some time, I think."

"They're wondering what to do with the body, I suppose; or fixing up the gadget that comes down and smothers you in the old four-poster bed. That's the kind of place it is or ought to be." And he eyed almost regretfully. "But actually they're probably pondering whether we're coming in to tea and, if so, whether they dare ask us eighteenpence each. Well, that settles it." He led the way round to the back of the house. "There came a thundering below, on the door," he mouthed; and Peter took white shock. "Two travellers benighted by the storm—cautiously light?—it sounds wrong—craved admission herself by way were now facing a tumble-down garden

and some outhouses, enclosed not by the usual wall but by rusty old railings, very dreary in the rain. A small iron gate and a flagged path pointed the way to a side-door. This was good enough. Adam held open the gate, and they marched up the path side by side, but they were still several yards from the door when it suddenly opened and an old woman, in a red shawl and looking like a witch, came creeping out. They stopped short and stared.

"Will you be wanting shelter, young man?" the crone called out, in a high wheezy voice, before they had moved or opened their mouths. As soon as they admitted the fact, she cried: "This way then, just for a minute or two," and beckoning them to follow, she hobbled across to the nearest outhouse, a few yards away, and threw open the door, holding it while they passed inside. It was a dim little place with only one window, and that window small, dirty, and set high up in the wall, and for the rest it was crowded with odds and ends, lamps, empty bottles, old gardening tools, broken plant pots, odd chair legs, dusty harness, and the like, and smelt unpleasantly of mould and paraffin. Still a little dazed, they had just time to remark the character of the place when its dim light was transformed to downright gloom by the door being closed behind them. The next moment they heard the sound of the key being turned in the lock outside, a little cackle, footsteps hobbling away, the banging of a door, and then nothing but the dreary patter of the rain.

For a moment they stood there, silent, unstirring^{er}

lost in that musty gloom, through which there moved fantastic shapes out of the depths of memory. Tales long gone out of mind came flickering back, and it seemed as if they had only to loosen their hold upon common reality for a second or so, to let things give but one more queer little shake, and that old world of sinister faerie would come creeping round them. Then they hastened to break the spell. Peter achieved a short brave laugh. Adam tried the door. "It really is locked, you know," he remarked, very casually. "That's rather queer. Does she think we may steal something?"

"I believe she's a witch," said Peter, lightly.

"So do I. And I feel like our Mr. Hansel, of that unfortunate firm, Messrs. Hansel and Gretel."

"If we looked out of the little window there," she said, "we should probably find that the moors and everything had gone and that miles and miles of those creepy beech-woods had grown up all round us."

She had found an old chair and, after removing her dripping hat and waterproof, had rather dubiously perched herself upon it. Adam contrived a seat out of an upturned bucket and a piece of board, and settled down to enjoy one of those delicious pipes that offer themselves after wind and rain. He was not so thoroughly soaked as he had imagined himself to be, but he was stiff and chilled and had to mop his head with his handkerchief to prevent little cold streams trickling down his neck. His eyes had now grown accustomed to this dim interior, and he looked across at Peter with unsmiling but friendly

curiosity. He liked the way she sat there frankly offering herself to his regard, without any one of the usual feminine wriggling and tittivating yourself, all with cries of "What a sight I must look!" Oddly enough, he had no sooner thought this than she gave what seemed to be a slightly impatient shrug, and demanded a dry cigarette. He handed one over, struck a match for her, and as they both bent forward, he remarked her heightened colour, the rather thick, level brows, darker than her hair, the full square little chin poised above the fine delicate neck. She was very obviously damp, muddy, and slightly bedraggled, and yet, by some curious chance, the assaults of wind and rain had somehow transformed what he remembered as a boyish and rather colourless charm, nothing more, into something like real beauty.

The thought made it rather embarrassing to return her direct even gaze. They had contrived to patronize their first queer little mood out of existence, and now he dropped easily into common reality. "I suppose she'll be back in a minute, full of apologies, having locked away all her silver spoons," he remarked, staring about him.

Peter did not reply for a moment. Then she caught and held his eye, and said very quietly: "Do you know, I've a feeling that she won't. It's absurd, of course, but I feel sure that we're imprisoned here."

He took his pipe out of his mouth. "That certainly is absurd. Why should we be?"

"I don't know," she replied. "But I feel it in my bones, my wild-geese's bones. It's a trap; another

ADAM IN MOONSHINE

of your adventures. Not that I mind, you know; I like it; but there it is." And with an air of calm finality she leaned back and gently blew out a column of smoke. "You'll see."

So far he certainly did not see. He would not admit to himself that he was even vaguely impressed, nevertheless he suddenly felt restless and did not resist an impulse to get up and look about him. He peered into corners, taking stock of the place, and moved around rather noisily, occasionally aiming a kick at various odd articles that were strewn about the floor. Then a sudden gesture from Peter, who had kept still and quiet in her chair, pulled him up.

"Listen!" She stared up at him. "I heard foot-steps outside."

And now he could hear them, too. But nothing happened at the door, and he felt a queer rush of anger. "Damn their cheek!" he cried. "We'll let them know we're still here." And he rattled the handle of the door, and let out a loud "Hello!" There was a moment's silence while they waited to see what would happen.

Then a noise at the little window swung him round. Peter jumped to her feet. The window opened from the bottom and the catch must have been on the outside, for someone there now lifted it up, and the next moment a face was framed in the opening and a great triumphant nose poked itself into the room.

"I thought I was not mistaken." It was as if the nose itself were addressing them. "My young fellow-passenger, Mr.—er—Stewart, I think, whom

I saw last in the custody of the police, and who afterwards escaped I believe. I've heard something since about you and your friends. I know what you are trying to do to this unhappy country, and I know my duty. You have now, I hope, made a salutary if unpleasant discovery, that law and order cannot be set at defiance even in this remote place."

When he first realized that the crown and summit of this adventure was nothing less than Canon Drewbridge's nose, Adam had wanted to laugh, but towards the conclusion of this characteristic speech he became both alarmed and indignant. "You've no right to keep us here, Canon Drewbridge," he cried up at the window. "What are you going to do with us?"

The Canon chuckled, clearly delighted with himself. "You wanted shelter—I saw that when I first noticed you staring at the house—and you shall have shelter. You and your—er—companion, this misguided young girl, who is even now, I imagine, regretting her folly ——"

"Don't be absurd!" Peter broke in, furiously. "I'm not regretting anything."

"Possibly not," the Canon continued, drily, "but perhaps you will, young lady. I believe that the pair of you are here on some unlawful errand—the choice of such a day as this for a visit only confirms my belief—and it is my intention, as I believe it is my duty, to detain you here while I communicate with the proper authorities. There is, you will be interested to learn, a telephone about two miles away, and I think our friend the Inspector, who has given

me more of his confidence since I saw you last, will be pleased to receive a message. There are, too,—er—other interested persons, as you will soon discover for yourselves. I am not going to see sense and decency and order flouted, perhaps the whole country dragged to ruin, under my very nose, without taking some steps to prevent it. And this is one of the steps.” Then very quickly he withdrew his head, lowered and fastened the window, and disappeared.

“But who is he, and what does he know about it?” Peter gasped.

“It’s Canon Drewbridge. Don’t you remember, he travelled up from town in the same carriage as your father and I? I told you about him.” And he described once more his previous encounter with the Canon. “He always sees plots and revolutions everywhere,” he went on to explain, “and he’ll simply be loving this. When you think of it, it was rather smart of the old boy to spot us like that and then send out his private witch or whatever else she is to lure us in and lock us up.”

“What an interfering, pompous old beast!” She still crackled with fury. “The way he talked! I’ve not met anyone for years I loathed so much on sight. He’s all the things I hate rolled into one.”

“I’m surprised you didn’t know about him before,” Adam remarked. “He’s quite a celebrity. And this is just the kind of thing he would do.” And then, feeling suddenly oracular, he added: “After all, he’s been shutting people up in smelly little

lumber-rooms all his life." He would have continued in this vein, but just then there came a noise from outside that aroused his curiosity. The rain had washed the little window during the time it had been raised above the Canon's head, and by mounting upon the bench that stood against the wall underneath, he could now look out. He did look out, and was just in time to see the Canon, resolute in oilskins, his nose an imperial triumph, wheeling an old bicycle through the gate. Evidently he did not mean to lose any time.

"He'll be telephoning in about half an hour," Adam observed, after jumping down and giving Peter the news.

Her first flush of anger had departed and she had sat down again, looking rather pale and tired. She received his news in a dismayed silence, but then, before he had time to say anything more, a sudden impulse brought her to her feet, crying: "O Adam! What shall we do?"

It sent him towering. "We'll get out of here somehow, even if it means burning the door down with this beastly paraffin." He was tremendously determined and emphatic. And then he looked at her again and changed his tone. "That is, if you're game. After all, you know"—for she had made an impatient gesture—"no great harm will come of it even if they find us here. They won't really do anything but worry you with questions."

"You're being ridiculous!" She looked quite annoyed. "You know very well we must get out of here. It doesn't matter what they will do with us,

we're not going to remain here to see. I should never forgive myself if we did."

Adam was beginning to feel apologetic. "My own attitude entirely," he admitted. "Only I thought—well ——"

"I knew it was," she broke in. "It's the only attitude. But then you go and spoil it by thinking that I would probably feel different about it, would want to sit here until they came and then smile sweetly at them?"

How touchy she was! And if it was not for that one weakness, what a perfect companion for an adventure! "Sorry!—Peter." She betrayed no sign of having heard her name from him for the first time. "I ought to have known you'd feel like that," he went on; and then, more energetically: "Yes, we must get out of here if only to wipe that lordly grin off his face."

She began looking about her. "Let's hurry, hurry! What about the window?"

He followed her glance and shook his head. "I've thought about that and it's useless. It's fastened on the outside, to begin with, and even then, if we could force it open or break it and then unfasten the catch, it's awkwardly high up and too small."

She eyed it reflectively. "I can get through nearly anything. Perhaps I could scramble out and then unlock the door—that is, if the key's still in the lock, and I think it is."

"So do I," said Adam. "I never heard her withdrawing it. But I'm certain you couldn't get through

THE WILD GEESSE

that window. No, the door's the only chance. We must concentrate on the door." He began to fill his pipe as he moved across.

Peter regarded these preparations with mingled disgust and indignation. "Oh, don't begin smoking! This isn't a time for smoking. We must hurry."

"Just the moment for a pipe," he replied, puffing away. Her impatience added a pleasant flavour of superior wisdom to his tobacco. "We've got to think. But before thinking ——" He broke off to give the door a violent pushing kick with the sole of his heavy boot. The lock held firm, "Just as I thought," he remarked. "It hardly rattled. Quite a stout door, this."

"Couldn't we use something as a battering-ram, and heave together?" She had now joined him at the door.

"Wait a minute." He bent forward to examine it more closely and lit a match. "Look! It's an old house door, and though it's obviously a tough old boy, it's got panels, and we might be able to make a hole there." And he pointed to the corner nearest the lock. "Then we could slip an arm through and if she really has left the key in, we can turn it. I believe burglars do that sometimes."

"I'm sure she did leave the key." Her voice rose in her excitement. "Come on, let's find some things to make the hole."

Their first discovery was a stump of candle on the bench, and with its flame held out before them, they went peering together into corners and poking about among the dusty litter until finally they had acquired

a little heap of tools, including an axe, a hammer, two saws, both rusty and one of them far too big to be of any service, a chisel, and several indeterminate pieces of iron. Urgent as the moment seemed to them and engrossed as they were, there was still some part of them detached from it, merely sitting back and appraising its quality, for once their eyes met and a question flashed between them, and Peter smiled and said "I'm loving it," and Adam smiled back and admitted that he was too. He thought he would remember this moment for ever; this Rembrandtesque interior of a tiny golden wavering light and huge sprawling shadows, the bright medallion of Peter's head, the treasure hunt among the dusty lumber; here, behind this locked door, a tiny world all their own, a warm glow of companionship and rich romance, and outside, under the rain they heard pattering on the roof, the cold desolate hills and the empty valley. Yet, so oddly tangled and contradictory are things, this was anything but their own world, here was their prison, its mean walls the very symbols of all they detested, whereas there outside, in no matter what grey desolation of hill and sky, was heart's desire.

He delivered a blow with the axe at the bottom corner of the panel nearest the lock. The axe remained in the wood, and by the time he had recovered it with a sharp wrench, he had left a long crack. Two more blows delivered in the same place produced a little shower of splinters and widened the crack.

"What a row!" exclaimed Peter, as she bent over

THE WILD GEESSE

the door with the candle in her hand. "Suppose the old woman or somebody hears it?"

Adam was looking round for the hammer and chisel. "Then we're probably dished," he replied. "They'll come and take away the key, to begin with. But perhaps there's only the old woman there, and she's probably deaf and pottering about in the house. We've got to risk her hearing us." He began using the chisel to widen the crack, and then wedged in sundry pieces of iron, which he hammered to such purpose that soon there was a hole large enough to admit the smaller saw. Having only about half an inch of space to work in, however, he failed to make much impression on the wood with oblique sawing, and returned to the axe, with the full approval of Peter, now dancing with impatience and eager to attack the door herself. The next few blows, aimed a little to the left of the crack, discovered a soft, worm-eaten area, and the wood came flying away, leaving a hole several inches square at the base. Adam stepped back and flung away the axe.

"My turn now!" Peter cried, pulling up her sleeves. Before he had time to interfere, she had thrust a long slender arm through the hole and was busy groping for the key. "I can just touch it with the ends of my fingers," she gasped, "but I can't turn it." With a final effort, bending over to the left as far as she could, wincing but resolute, she contrived to thrust her arm further in and curve her hand further round. "Got it!" And once more they heard the key turn in the lock. It was a sorely-bruised arm, marked with at least one long scratch, that she

ADAM IN MOONSHINE

withdrew at last from the hole, but now there was no time or thought to spare for minor injuries. Hastily collecting their things, they flung open the door in triumph and ran out into the free air.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE STRANGE COMPANION

IT was all intoxicating; the fresh scent of it the very breath of freedom after the stale smell of must and old lamps; the grey-green heights, the long black lines of wall, the swirl of mist, a paradisial glimpse after that shuttered and be-lumbered place. Fleet-footed and alight with triumphant laughter, they sped like hares across the first glittering field. "Like escaping from a dust-bin," Peter cried. At the far wall, a common impulse made them halt and look back at the shattered chrysalis they left behind. A flutter of crimson at the gate below showed them the old woman. They waved derisively, and saw her return to the house. "I'd give anything to see the Canon's face when he comes back," Adam grinned. Peter hurried forward into the next field. "I don't want to see his face again," she remarked as he caught up to her. "And I shan't be happy until I'm well out of sight and sound of him." This new release had banished all feeling of weariness, all memory of sodden clothes and cramped limbs; and they went striding up the track that had brought them down into the valley an hour before, striding confidently now where before they had been slipping and scrambling, as if the day had just begun.

It was, however, easier now than it had been though the ground was still soaked. The rain had almost stopped; there was an occasional faint glimpse

of the afternoon sun, and one green fold of the hill far away stood out in full sunlight; the white reek along the tops was rapidly thinning to a pale blue haze; and a solitary lark somewhere rose and sang through the brightening air. To all this Peter lifted her clear-cut face and wide eyes, and waved a benedictory hand. "Isn't it glorious!" she cried, shining over him and over all their world in turn. "And it's going to be fine, finer and finer."

He had thought so too, but now he surveyed the whole sky. "I'm not so sure." He nodded towards the west. "Look at that. I don't like the look of that." The whole westerly sky was darkly smouldering, and hill and cloud were hugely merged into one thunderous mass. "If that lot comes down on us," he went on, "we shall know about it." She was like a child going to a picnic. She waved again, this time in gay defiance, and cried: "You're nearly as heavy as it looks, Master Adam. You're rapidly becoming solemn and apprehensive and parental. You'll be telling me soon that there's another day to-morrow, or that I shall be crying before bedtime. We shan't have another downpour. And if we have, it doesn't matter."

Then she suddenly held out the hand she had been waving, the hand that had gone groping for the key, glanced at it and was not able to withdraw it before he too had noticed the trickle of blood. "Hello! What's that?" he cried, "Is that the scratch?" In reply, she nodded and remarked that it was nothing; there was no necessity for him to look at it. The exasperating creature showed him nothing but a

raised and set little chin, and went striding on. "It's my turn to complain now," he said, with a friendly warmth and frankness that more than cancelled out his display of irritation. "I may be heavy and parental and all that you say I am, but aren't you overdoing this stoic Amazon business?" She flushed at this. "And is there any real point," he pursued, "in refusing to show me that scratch and, if necessary, to have the blood wiped off?" It was characteristic of her that she should now eye him steadily, the merest touch of rose in her cheeks to mark the passing confusion, and then without a word slip up the sleeves of her waterproof and tweed coat underneath and hold out for his inspection the arm that had lately set them free.

Adam grasped her hand lightly, aware of the delicate cool touch of the finger-tips, but not for once deliberately so, and looked down at the extended arm. There was a dark bruise or two on its round white surface, and some red marks where it had been pressed against the splintered edge of the hole in the door. Blood was slowly oozing from the long scratch, and there was a crimson stain down one side where her sleeve had been rubbing. One of the hill's innumerable streams was foaming down a few yards away from them, and to this he hastened, returning a minute later with a dripping handkerchief. Without words, quiet-eyed, cool, serious, yet with a vague warmth flowing between them, encompassing them, together they bathed the arm and bound it up where the scratch was deepest. When they had done, Adam felt queerly troubled, as if by some disturbing sweet-

ness in the air. There had been a moment during the time she had rested her hand in his and he had seen the stain vanish from the soft white flesh, when he had been assailed by an impulse to bend down and press his lips against her arm, not in haste and passion, but slowly, calmly, with a curious cool tenderness that he felt was now taking possession of him. The impulse had come and gone, but he had wondered about it, for it was quite different, for example, from those impulses of yesterday in the orchard, and the whole feeling that would in some way have been expressed and communicated by the action was itself different from anything he remembered. He was still troubled by it all, still haunted by that vague sweetness in the very air, when they made ready to move again. He felt that he did not know how to act towards her, did not even know what to say.

But a great gust of wind, dark and dripping from the west, swooped down on them to aid him in retrieving the situation. It gave him an opportunity of being equally bluff and boisterous. "We're in for it again," he roared. "Have some chocolate?" She accepted half the broken packet with a murmured word of thanks, and munched and trudged away without speaking. But though she was quiet, she was not unfriendly nor even detached; her silence was filled with an easy understanding, lit with companionship; he had now passed the point with her where it was necessary to exchange words; or so it seemed to him. He told himself that she was not of those who put their trust in such exchanges and

believe that nothing vital is accomplished in love and friendship without words, but rather one of those who distrust the whole verbal jugglery and look forward to the moment when such communication becomes merely play, shifting foam on the deep ocean of human relationship. Perhaps already she felt, as he himself believed he partly felt, that their two bodies swinging forward side by side, breasting the hill together, were busy consolidating their friendship, were deep in their own talk. Why, then, barter the dangerous symbols of the dictionary?

They were now two-thirds of the way up the hillside ; the sky was darkening over them ; and already the western heights were lost in the slanting rain. The head of the valley behind them was a vague noise of water, through which there came, like a sudden rent in the short curtain of sound, a distant baa from huddled sheep or the occasional scream of the great moorland birds. The wind had gone howling away, and now once more there had fallen that sinister quiet which heralded the approach not of sweet lispings summer rain but of a black downpour, the blind anger of the over-burdened sky. "Look at it," he cried. She looked and nodded, pursing up her lips a little. "There's nothing to be done about it," she remarked, finally. "We can't stop here."

Fifty yards or so to the right was one of those crazy stone walls that may be seen crawling and twisting through the most desolate places in the Pennine Hills, that appear to serve no useful purpose,

do not seem to be the handiwork of men, but the creation of the hills themselves, being there—and remaining there without ever being diminished or augmented by a single piece of stone—only to add the last touch to the strange landscape, to bind its green folds and high places, its cloaks of close green turf, its crown of bracken and ling, with the dark rims and iron braid of rock. This wall was nearly a man's height and ran straight up the hill almost to the summit. "If the rain comes slanting from the west, as I think it will," he said, "our best plan is to make for the wall there, and climb under cover over that. It won't give us much shelter, but it's better than nothing, and as it runs straight to the top, we shan't be encouraged to lose our way."

She agreed, and had no sooner turned to read the way across than they felt the first chill swish of rain. There were tracts of green slime and oozy peat between them and the wall, and it looked to Adam as if Peter, now some yards ahead, would be bogged. But a few graceful leaps landed her on less treacherous ground, on which, however, she now seemed to limp a little. Watching her as he followed on behind, Adam found himself visited again by that feeling that he had struggled with before. Now it was stronger than ever. Something impelled him, perhaps it was the mere sight of her there, a creature so eager and delicate on that massive hill, to hurry forward and join her, and once there, neighbouring this one bright fellow-spirit in all that old and savage world of rock and cloud, to cry foolishly, incoherently from the heart, "Splendid, splendid, Peter! Let's

hurry on!" and to stretch out a hand and grip her bent elbow, almost lifting her forward.

She flung out her arm and flashed round upon him. "Oh, you are stupid! Don't you see you're spoiling everything!" She sent all the day's shared adventures whirling away; strange eyes looked at one another through the rain. Adam was dismayed, hurt, angry all at once, but the torrent was now lashing down upon them, his face was streaming so that he could hardly glare back at her, and it was necessity rather than a mere desire to escape from the situation that made him cry to her, after a vague shout of apology, not to stop but to move on under cover of the wall. Both bending slightly to escape the full fury of the slanting downpour, slipping, scrambling, soaked and aching, they moved on, Peter first and Adam a pace or two behind. In this monstrous situation, gasping and wincing and shouting through the storm, they made an endeavour to come to terms. Never could Adam remember a talk conducted so crazily, yet it seemed so necessary to have it out then and there that he could not move on in silence, and neither, it appeared, could she.

"Why did I spoil everything? I don't understand you," he roared. He had wished to be cold, a trifle supercilious, but found it difficult when he had to shout to be heard at all.

"You must see what I mean," she shrieked in reply, "I thought you were different. Everything was right between us. And then you go and . . ." But if there was anything more, it was lost in the wind and rain.

"I go and what?" he shouted back. "Aren't you making a fuss about nothing?" He might have said more, so indignant did he feel, but at that moment he nearly went sprawling. His right boot seemed to be rapidly filling with water; he could feel it between his toes every time his foot went down.

". . . Not what you did, but the attitude of mind at the back of it," came the tiny shriek. "Don't you see it must be one of two things, and they're both equally objectionable . . . beastly . . . any decent girl. Either it's patronage or mauling . . ."

"Or what?" he bellowed. Lord, this was absurd! But he must get at it.

"Or mauling, *mauling*—touching, stroking, grasping, wanting a nice soft plaything. Well, either it was that or it was patronage—chivalry—the weaker, gentle sex rubbish! Don't you see! I won't be patronized. You wouldn't have done it to another man. And I won't be mauled." There had fallen a sudden little lull, through which the last three sentences had come down to him in gigantic capitals.

He wanted to laugh and protest and argue all at one and the same time; but she was off again, this time more quietly, before he was able to do anything but gasp in the background. "You could be so absolutely right, and that's the irritating part of it. You've been splendid most of the day, better than I thought any man could be, almost, and it's all been gorgeous fun and I've adored it. And then you deliberately begin to spoil it. Patronage or mauling, or a mixture of both. Yes, that's what it was, a mixture of both, for you're both a patronizing senti-

mentalist and a mauler, like those old men who undress you with their little piggy eyes every time they look at you . . .”

He was horrified and furious: “Rubbish! You know very well I’m nothing of the kind.” He had a horrible vision of those old men, for even he remembered noticing their eyes.

A laugh floated back to him. “Well, I don’t say you’re as bad as they are,” she went on, “but take care you don’t grow up into one. I don’t even say you’re a very bad specimen, as young men go, and you might be really decent if you tried hard. But just now you’re too full of sex.”

“I’m not full of sex,” he roared indignantly. He loathed the idea of being full of sex, and hated the jargon that turned sex into something you could be full of, just as if it were beer or microbes. “I’m not full of anything just now but rain-water,” he added, with a rather sulky growl.

“Absolutely full,” she went on, calmly. “It peeps out of your eyes. You can’t hide it. I noticed it the very first time I saw you.” And with that, her feet slipped suddenly from under her and she came sprawling back and would have sent the two of them flying if he had not contrived to grasp the wall with one hand and steady her with the hand that held his stick.

As they righted themselves, half a dozen retorts to all her accusations flashed through his mind, but he dismissed them as cheap and unworthy and contented himself with asking: “When was this very first time you saw me? I had no idea you were so

observant." Once more he was addressing her soaking hat and streaming waterproof, for they had moved forward again.

"It doesn't matter when it was I first saw you—or noticed you. You're very disappointing and I'm still furious." And then the strange creature halted, turned round and smiled at him. Evidently she had talked out her temper and wanted now to buy him off with a grin. And then she could talk of being treated as if she were another man! But he was not to be so cheaply appeased. Unfortunately, however, before he had done more than consider the possibility of an averted face, a cold glance, a raising of the eyebrows, he found himself grinning in return, grinning idiotically through the downpour. It was odd, though, how attractive the face of a girl, a real girl and not a daub of red and white, could be in the wet, so freshly rosy of cheek and lip, eyes clearly washed, raindrops in her hair. And how angry she would be if she knew what he was thinking! Was this peeping out of his eyes, too? "March on, girl," he gruffly commanded; and she went on again, none too quickly now, leaving him to scramble after her, half-drowned but still pondering.

This time there were no mists sweeping over the summit, for instead of comfortably settling upon the heights the clouds seemed to have burst upon them. There had been rain most of the way up, but now they plunged into one great flickering sheet of water, hissing down on the broadening pools and into a thousand streams that scored their way through the loose brown turf and rushed below in beer-coloured

torrents. Nothing was to be seen except this grey desolate little plateau, a few acres of wet, jagged rock and swimming soil in a world of falling water; yet this little was usually more than they were able to see, so blinding was the downpour; and now, side by side, huddling in their heavy drenched coats, they reeled rather than walked across the summit. Setting their teeth, all intent now upon mere movement, they exchanged neither a word nor even a glance. Before they had reached the beginning of the long descent into Runnerdale, Adam had sunk several times in bog and holes over the top of his boots, and it looked as if Peter had, too. Now she was gasping a little. On the very edge of the descent, she suddenly swayed to the right, and he saw that her right foot had disappeared and that she was tugging away desperately. He crossed to her, and she leaned on his shoulder while she gave a gigantic tug. All that appeared was a little stockinged foot, very wet and stained; the shoe remained imbedded in the slime. He retrieved it for her and then helped her to put it on. She thanked him with a pale smile, and moved on again, more slowly now and obviously with an effort.

"I feel," cried Adam, between blowing and gasping, "I feel like a man—who's just been killed twice over—drowned and stoned." He shook himself like a dog out of water. Peter merely nodded and then tightened her lips. Twice she tottered against him, and once her stick, on which she was leaning heavily down the treacherous slope, went sliding out of her hand, and by an immense effort he had darted across to forestall her and pick it up himself. He had noticed

her swaying, and if she had stooped she might have fallen. He himself only moved now with an effort, and felt his bones, the only dry things left to him, creaking as he harried them on. The descent was rapidly becoming one long wet agony, a matter of clenched fists and teeth, even to him, and he could only shudderingly guess what it had become to her, in whom all was numbed and unwilling and crying for mercy, except the indomitable little blaze of spirit that kept her by his side. There came to his mind what she had said about this country during the morning, and he fumbled with the thought that it had suddenly challenged her and that this was her reply; but he never got it clear, this thought, which became only a slow and very broken procession of detached words and vague images passing somewhere behind the wind and the rain and the shining slope, behind damp skin and aching muscles and eyes peering through the water. And now those eyes discovered something not very far below: it was one of those stone shelters used by the shepherds. Had Peter seen it, too? He turned and saw that she had; her eyes still rested on it. "Let's go in there," he gasped to her. "I don't know—about you—but I'm absolutely fagged." It seemed ages since he had last heard her voice. It now came to him in a tiny whisper "Yes, let's. I'm done, too." A few minutes later they staggered in through the wide open doorway and flung themselves down on the stone bench there, letting the arms that now held up their weary heads rest on the table of stone.

After that long buffetting on the windy, rainy hill,

there was something unreal in this little sheltered space, this sudden quietness; and everything that happened there was like a dream, one of those slow and very quiet dreams that are strangely memorable and as haunting as a tune. The things of the surface, movements, speech, the records of the senses, were all ghostly, so many dim scrawls on the page of life; but something far within, at the very glowing core, lived intensely, casting a light over that page, holding it, staring at it, fixedly. Nothing that happened was surprising; all was quietly inevitable; if wonder was there, it did not point to this or that, but sustained the whole scene, created the atmosphere in which it moved; and it was only afterwards, when he went back in his memory to explore the situation, to revisit, with a queer little ache, this shelter and its lost dream, that Adam began to feel surprise.

After resting a minute or two, he had struggled to his feet, removed his raincoat, now a sodden mass, and after shaking it had spread it out over the table to dry. A handkerchief rubbed vigorously over his head and face had completed the ineffectual drying process. He was soaked to the skin from head to foot, but it was warmer in here and already he felt better. Meanwhile, Peter had not made a movement. Without a word, he now stood over her and lightly touched her hat and coat. After a moment, she slowly took off her hat, and he helped her out of her coat, which he quietly shook and then spread out near his own. Still silent, they sat down side by side on the bench, leaning back against the edge of the table behind. There was no sound but the hollow pattering

ADAM IN MOONSHINE

of the rain above and a vague noise of running water outside. They were sitting at the bottom of the ocean, two ghosts of the drowned, while far above, the wild seas churned and doomed ships lit their flares. Mechanically, Adam filled his pipe, and then, still dazed, he held it in his hand unlit while huge dim fancies lumbered through his mind. Staring down, he caught sight of Peter's left shoe, suddenly looked at it as if it were something from another planet. It was a little shoe but very strong, one of those brown brogue things with fantastic projecting tongues, now all soaked and stained with mud and water. How ridiculously small it was, and yet how capable, alert, half impudent and yet infinitely gallant! The thought of this little thing trotting by his side all day, always keeping pace, grappling with streaming rock and plunging through the slime, this absurd shoe, set his heart stirring queerly. He felt a sudden rush of tenderness.

He had not said a word, and had not made a sound or movement, but now, just as if there had been some magic sign between them, Peter slowly drooped and swayed towards him, finally resting her head against his sleeve. And then a small damp hand came groping and found its way at last into his. There it remained for some time, until at length he gently brought back his arm and put it round her shoulders so that she would not slip. She nestled more closely to him, her face pressed now against the lapel of his coat. Only an occasional quiver of her eyelashes showed that she was not asleep. And then, very softly, he began celebrating their day's exploits, and

almost as if to himself, paid tribute to her companionship. Nothing had been possible without her: she had been wonderful. But there came a murmur from below, and he had a brief glimpse of upturned eyes. No, she had not been wonderful, and—and—she was sorry. His heart swelling, he assured her that he could not imagine what she could be sorry about, whispered her name and his astonished admiration in one long trembling breath. He tightened his clasp so that now he could feel the smooth, yielding shoulder under the rough tweed, and she quivered, released a faint sigh, and then once more pressed her face against him; nor did they speak another word, but sat there, silent, close, while time went ebbing away from them.

Neither of them could have said how long it was before a pale gleam of sunlight came through the doorway to remind them of the world outside, a world now rising from the waters. It lifted the spell from them, and together, with that bustle under cover of which so many shy emotions are locked away, they stamped about, struggled into their stiff coats, and limped out into the open. Loudly they compared watches and various notes on wet clothes, tired limbs, and gnawings of hunger. It was past the dinner-hour. They had visions, they said, of hot baths, dry things and the supper of heroes. They wondered what the day had brought the great conspiracy, whose very existence, had passed out of mind, Adam confessed, these last few hours, to which confession Peter had no reply but an enigmatic glance. They recalled Hake and the

Canon to one another, and in the face of these shrinking images, were two very droll and triumphant. The pursuit, the trap, the escape, all the day's official adventures were passed under review to the quick-step of bright chatter. And all the while, somewhere behind this scene of noisy fellowship, stealthy hands were folding away mysterious fabrics of experience and secret cupboard doors were clicking. When this was all done, the last door shut, there fell between them a long silence.

They had limped stiffly down nearly to the bottom of the hill, and had already chosen a field-path that would enable them to avoid the village and make straight for the Hall; and now the day, instead of roaring them home in their own wind and rain, had banished the tumult and, with a serene irony, had recalled its lost midsummer and settled into a quiet green dream, the peace that comes between summer sunset and twilight. The hills were sinking to blue distance and beyond their wavering line were flushed little clouds like dim roses in the sky. Somewhere a late lark soared, and all the sweet-smelling fields they passed, and all the darkening thickets, were happy with calling birds. Once, as he surveyed the faintly-mottled silvery expanse above the hills, where a little patch of washed blue was showing, Adam caught a glimpse of the moon, a white, brittle mask. "This seems another world," he remarked softly, and then, looking down at himself, added ruefully: "And hardly the world for us." She, too, had been drinking it all in, turning grave young eyes



this way and that, and after a moment, when all that he saw was a pale, clear-cut profile, she said, gently and seriously: "I know. That's what I've been thinking. Perhaps you didn't mean all that I was thinking, though your words often do mean more than they pretend to; all our words do, I think, at least at certain times. But I'm not afraid of it—down here, I mean. Look at that. Isn't it glorious?" And she pointed.

He looked up and saw a tiny spur of the hill crowned with pine and fir, a little exquisite group of young trees, strong, delicately graced, all perfectly silhouetted against a sky of palest lavender. There was something in him escaped and went winging up at the sight, and he was so moved that before he had time to think what he was doing, he had stammered: "Why!—you know—it reminds me of you—it's just like you." And then he wondered why he had made such an idiotic remark, which even in her strangely quiet mood of the moment she would not let go unpunished. Hastily looking away, he waited for the storm to break. But she had turned to him, flushed, catching her breath a little: "Do you really mean that?" He saw her aglow, and nodded soberly. "Thank you," she cried; and then, after the tiniest laugh at herself, she went on: "That's the best thing that was ever said to me, or ever said to anyone." They could have said a thousand things to one another after that, but they were every tired, and somehow it was better to say nothing, to trudge on in a deep, friendly silence towards the place where the rooks were cawing in the trees and there slowly

ADAM IN MOONSHINE

ascended that blue smoke which spells in the evening air the end of so many great days.

“ I’ve no doubt at all,” said Mrs. Belville, who met them on the very doorstep, “ that you’ve had the most incredible adventures. But I’m not going to listen to a single word about them. If you could see yourselves, the pair of you ! Your next adventure will consist of hot baths, beds and food, all of which have been waiting for you for some time. Off you go ! ” And she harried them up the stairs, where they parted in search of bathrooms and bedrooms, parted for the night, perhaps for ever.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE MIDSUMMER DAY'S DREAM

HELEN was the first person he met that morning. He was descending the stairs on his way to breakfast when he saw her. The hall below was a pool of misty sunlight, and there in the middle of it, flecked with dim gold, was a figure in a cream and cherry-coloured frock. A lovely dark head was raised at his approach, and as he saw her face light up with recognition, her eyes kindling with delicate mischief, he caught his breath.

"Good morning, Mr. Stewart," she said. "I had begun to think you were a fabulous monster—no, not that, but a legendary hero—and that everybody here was busy inventing your exploits." Her voice went rippling down in mock apology. "You were becoming less real than your old namesake—if that's allowed."

"Wh-which namesake?" He was stammering a little. Helen made him feel bold enough inside, a towering fellow, but very shy outside, in speech, glance, gesture. "Christian or surname? The one in the garden or the one over the water?"

"Oh, the Eden one, of course," she replied, still with a mock apology.

"I think I am less real," he confessed. "And I had been feeling much the same about you. Only I had come to the conclusion that you and your namesake were one and the same, and that you really had gone to Egypt." He was gathering courage.

"To Egypt?" She opened wide eyes and wrinkled her brow, and did it all so deliciously that he wanted to keep her there for ever.

"Yes, don't you remember. Some say she went there before Troy, and left a wraith behind. Others say she went there after Troy."

"Oh!" There was a mocking little suggestion of a gasp. Then she held up a finger. "I'm sure that's not allowed, even if I did begin it. But I have a message from Peter, who sends you her love—no, not that, I'm sure, but whatever it is that Peter does send people. The poor darling's suddenly developed a cold in the head, after your tremendous yesterday, and now she has to stay in bed all day. She was furious at first, but she's resigned now and has just begun reading *Huckleberry Finn* for about the fiftieth time. I asked her why, and she said she always reads *Huckleberry Finn* when she has a cold. Isn't she an odd, delightful girl?"

Adam agreed that she was. He also said that he was sorry about the cold, feeling sure that he really was sorry, though it seemed rather absurd of Peter to be so fond of colds. He saw her, watery-eyed, red-nosed, sniffing, and then, hastily dismissing the image, smiled at Helen, with whom it was obviously impossible to associate colds in the head.

"It's particularly wretched her missing to-day," Helen went on, "because she'd have adored it."

"Is there anything special about to-day?" Adam asked, though already he felt in his bones that there was.

"Of course!" she cried, pretending great excite-

ment. "This is going to be *the* day. It's begun already. There's historic occasion written all over it. Haven't you heard the news? You shouldn't stay in bed so late. The clans are arriving, at least there are lairds all over the place, rolling up in gigantic cars."

"I don't see any," said Adam, looking about him as if the lairds were a kind of moth.

Helen waved a hand towards the breakfast-room. "There are several in there," she remarked. "They're all plutocrats, you know, not mere Highland gentry; cotton, soap, rubber, and so on; and being introduced to them is just like reading an advertisement hoarding. They're all household words. One of them has already offered me a part in musical comedy, at the 'Frivolity,' I think. It was Lord Lochferry, who owns it, and who's really a Lancashire cotton-spinner, you know. I hadn't known the man two minutes, and during those two minutes hadn't shown the slightest desire to go on the stage. But nothing would stop him, and he called me 'my dear.'"

"Of all the confounded cheek!" Adam began, sure that he hated the fellow.

"That's what I thought," she went on. "But it's getting madder and madder. And to-night there's to be a grand dinner and historic meeting afterwards, when a certain personage—that's the phrase, isn't it?—is expected to be present. Yes, he's really coming to-night, or so the Baron says this morning. And if he doesn't, the Baron will have to invent him, after all this fuss."

Everything seemed to become mad and merry under her eyes. The world seemed to dance round her. Adam was loth to let her go, and, suddenly shy again, stammered: "What are you—are you going chasing off somewhere to-day?"

"I'm going this minute to help Lady Baddeley-Fragge in the garden. And there she is." She darted away, but called over her shoulder as she went: "Come and help us after you've had breakfast if there are no more heroics for you." Then she was gone. Adam stood still a moment staring after her. There seemed a curious drowning sweetness in the air. It was absurd, but he was beginning to choke a little and tremble, just as he had done years ago when he had wakened on Christmas morning and seen dimly through the gloom of the shuttered nursery, the packages heaped about his bed. Perhaps it was because the world now seemed like those packages, hugely bulging with promise.

Breakfast was an odd, noisy affair, in which grotesque figures moved illusively in the morning sunshine. The plutocratic lairds were there, some half-dozen of them. One or two were just so much parchment and pointed little eyes, but the rest were big men with enormous heads and jutting chins, jovial brigands of industry, buccaneers born two hundred years too late, fellows who were obviously never happy unless they were planning raids upon property and pretty women. With the exception of the Baron, the other men of the party who were present were completely dominated by these massive intruders; but the Baron moved among them as an

equal, if not a superior, and managed the biggest bull-necked Cæsar of them all as deftly as he managed Sir Arthur or Templake. Breakfast was over for most of them, and they were now lighting gigantic cigars and either leaning back heavily in their chairs or wandering to the window. The Baron, after giving Adam a glance of mingled triumph and mischief, a word or two, and an introduction here and there, had collected two of the largest magnates, who could not claim equality with him on the score of either bulk of body or length of cigar, and had shepherded them out as if they were prize rams. Another of them, known as the Laird of Strathsglen, but resembling an ancient Assyrian monarch newly barbered and tailored was at the other end of the room talking in a curiously penetrating and lisping voice to a very bewildered Sir Arthur, who apparently found himself confronted with a plan to put the conspiracy on the basis of a limited liability company. Every now and then the voice of this laird from the desert, telling its tale of "debenturth" and "athethmenth," came cutting through every sound in the room.

Templake crossed over just as Adam was finishing his breakfast. In this company he looked subdued and more than ever the unsuccessful water-colourist, though Adam never knew to the very last whether he had ever taken up a brush in his life. Apparently he had heard something about yesterday's adventures, probably from Peter, and now he wanted the whole story, being particularly curious about the meeting with their old acquaintance, the Canon. While Adam

was satisfying this curiosity with a rather flippant account of the lamp-room episode, he was also going back in remembrance to that railway-carriage in which he had first met the Canon and this very Templake who now almost gaped at him. He felt rather contemptuous but at the same time pitiful towards that ignorant, wondering self in the railway-carriage, yet he could not help noticing that the events in which that self had taken part were beginning to assume a character very different from the happenings of the moment; already those adventures of the train were touched with that far-away wonder, already they were wearing an homeric look. Strange, how quickly life moved forward, how things had changed behind you each time you turned your head! In a day or two, perhaps, this very talk he was having now with Templake would have taken on that appearance and quality, would be something shining from a lost world. Everything he might say and do during these next few hours, all the day's events, would glide softly away, apparently merging into the passing commonplace, and then after a lapse of time, it might be a week, a month, a year, they would suddenly compose and erect themselves into an antique heroic group, white marble or enduring bronze, gleaming back there above the long fading avenues and dim lawns of memory. Everything, he told himself, was just beginning, but now he had a sudden premonition that everything was soon to end too, that these very moments now shredding away were those above all others that he would return to in wonder once they had grouped them-

selves, radiant in lost sunshine, in his remembrance. But all the while he was telling his tale of yesterday.

"Just what you might expect of the fellow," said Templake, as they strolled out of the room together. "I've heard of him, of course, but didn't recognize him in the train. You heard our talk there?"

"Some of it," Adam replied.

"After a few minutes' talk, I saw what type of man I had to deal with, a bigoted obscurantist, a narrow pessimist, a denier of beauty and truth, with an absolutely closed mind and heart. You saw how I handled him?"

"I did," said Adam, heartily, thankful that the question had taken such a form.

"My dear Geoffrey, I'm sorry to intrude, particularly at such a moment"—it was Mrs. Belville who had joined them—"but I must point out, as a sister and, I trust, a lifelong friend, that never once have you handled anybody. All your life you've been handled."

"Nonsense, Muriel!" But he had clearly had some forty years of this, and had long ago admitted defeat. "You don't know what we're talking about."

"Not that I think you're any the worse for that, because there's too much of this handling about," she went on calmly, looking from one to the other in her usual cool masterful fashion. "And talking about handling, what on earth are we to do with your latest recruits, these industrial magnates and Oriental moneylenders that have suddenly taken to masquerading as Scots gentlemen and Jacobites from

the Highlands? Who induced these gallant gentlemen to join the romantic lost cause? "

Templake looked dubious and there was gloom in his voice. " I didn't, and I'm not sure it's a good thing their being here."

" And I'm positive it isn't," his sister remarked. " My dear, most of them are dreadful. The very sight of them has decided me to take at least half a dozen well-known household commodities out of my shopping lists for ever."

" I don't understand," Adam put in. " Have they actually joined up? "

" Well, no, not exactly," Templake replied, slowly and in his best historical manner. " They're pledged to secrecy, of course, and are all interested, and so are here to talk things over and to meet the heir when he comes to-night. I don't care much for them myself, but I can see that they might be very useful, and it's high time we looked at the practical side of things. They all have enormous estates in Scotland, where many of their tenants are probably genuine old Jacobites; and they're all very wealthy and influential, and being afraid of the coming republic and a possible social revolution, they might be ready to throw in their lot with us. Meanwhile they're considering it."

" Which means, I take it," said Mrs. Belville, " they're estimating the possible loot and weighing the bribes. When Lady Matchways comes down and sees them, she'll be sending out for dynamite. Unless the Baron can persuade them to wear his stock of false beards—and he's quite capable of it—when

THE MIDSUMMER DAY'S DREAM

they attend the grand conspiratorial meeting to-night, I refuse to be interested. I see this affair ending in either half a dozen bogus companies or two or three new musical comedies, for these gentlemen apparently deal in both. Meanwhile, I look like having a frantic day, for I've promised to help Lady Baddeley-Fragge with the arrangements for to-night, which means that I shall probably have to do it all. As usual, she's begun already, poor dear, by gathering flowers, and that will probably take her all day."

"That reminds me," said Adam, as casually as he could with Mrs. Belville's eye upon him, "I think I promised to help Lady Baddeley-Fragge in the garden this morning."

"Did you, indeed!" She raised her eyebrows at him. "Well, I think I can find you something more important to do than that. I shall probably need both of you soon. Besides, I believe Helen's helping her in the garden. Ah!" She broke off to regard him quizzically, and then addressed the two of them again. "I must say that the man Siddell looks like being a treasure. Already he's taken half the load off our shoulders, and is going down to Lobley or somewhere with a gigantic number of commissions, food, wine, and what not, and is bringing some extra waiters back with them. Apparently he knows where hey, and everything else, too, are to be found, and he never turns a hair whatever you suggest to him. I don't know what kind of a conspirator he makes, but he's certainly a cool and efficient hand at a rushed house-party. If he weren't taking part in this

conspiracy for money, I should begin to suspect him. He's much too sensible."

Adam was staring past her down the hall. Helen had just entered from the garden, her arms heaped with white lilac. The sunlight came streaming in with her. The drifting fragrance of the blossom heralded her approach.

Mrs. Belville turned, and her face softened a moment. Then she shook a finger at her niece, crying: "Helen, come here! What have you been doing to this young man? I suddenly saw his face light up, and I thought at first it was my talk of wine and extra waiters, knowing his sex as I do, but then I saw that it was you. That, I think, is preferable, and of course, my dear, you make a very charming picture, a thing you can always be trusted to make; but nevertheless it won't do."

Confused as he was by this speech, Adam was still looking at Helen, and now she raised her eyes to his for one sweet drowning moment. Then, without any sign of embarrassment, she looked at her aunt and calmly observed: "Mr. Stewart and I have only exchanged half a dozen remarks. You mustn't tease him, my dear." She held out her armful of white blossom to them. "Double white lilac. Isn't it miraculous? It's probably the last there'll be anywhere in the country this year. Perhaps there never will be any more." Her voice was dying away and Adam's heart was perishing with it. "Who knows?"

"I know," said her aunt, briskly. "There'll be just as much next year. And I also know that you got that remark from Lady Baddeley-Fragge, whose

botanical-apocalyptic strain I could recognize anywhere. Still"—and she bent down to the blossom—"it is lovely. And so are you, my child. The only difference between you is that you are persistently and grossly aware of the fact, and the lilac isn't. And now I must fly." And she sent them all flying in different directions.

Adam went out into the garden, where Helen would return after she had gone through the house, like Spring, leaving white blossom and the scent of lilac in every room. There he found Mr. Hooby standing on the lawn, his hands behind his back, flashing his round spectacles at the front of the house, where innumerable birds were wheeling and darting. "I reckon I'm to be a very busy man to-day, Mr. Stewart," said Mr. Hooby, very solemnly, "but I just couldn't go inside and talk business before I'd watched those birds for a spell. Lady Baddeley-Fragge tells me that's what you call a pied-wagtail, and it certainly is a beautiful bird. It has all your swallows and martins well beaten."

There were about a dozen of these wagtails skimming through the most intricate evolutions and almost glittering in their rapid alternation of deep black and dazzling white. They were not common birds, but neither were they very rare, and Adam remembered having seen them before, but now as he stared, his eye held by their flashing beauty and abandon, they seemed unearthly visitants, and the sight of them lit the morning, this house and all the people in it, with a gleam of faery. He looked from them to the round, rapt face of Mr. Hooby beside

him, and there came to him the thought of Helen with her white trail of blossom, and vaguer thoughts of Lady Baddeley-Fragge somewhere behind them waist-deep among her roses, of the Baron and his fat flock of millionaires, of Peter and her *Huckleberry Finn*, of all the others there, and he lost himself in wonderment. He stared in a dream at Mr. Hooby, and Mr. Hooby stared in a dream at the wagtails.

Suddenly he felt tremendously zestful and happy, and smiled at Mr. Hooby as if that gentleman were the oldest and best of his friends, as indeed at that moment he somehow seemed to be. Out of the fullness of his heart, Adam asked his companion about the new arrivals, of whom he felt sure Mr. Hooby would approve. To his surprise, however, Mr. Hooby had a very small opinion of these fantastic lairds. "No, sir," he told Adam, "we can do that kind of man better in America. I like your gentlemen, such as our host here, who's a wonderful type; but I'll say these other fellows don't come to much with me. They're not big enough and simple enough. I don't say they won't be mighty useful in the movement if they come in—I stand by my old friend, Baron Roland there—for they've certainly got money and some pull, and they're all wearing these good old names and running big estates up north, where there's any amount of the fine old Jacobite spirit about, they tell me. And that's what gets me—old traditions and loyalties and real downright chivalry, the spirit of roam-ance. But if you want these other fellows, just the big, simple, primitive money-getters and pushers, then we've got men on our side—and

THE MIDSUMMER DAY'S DREAM

some of them are friends of mine—you couldn't beat." And he beamed at Adam and was so obviously filled with an essential kindness, and yet so curiously unreal as a person, that Adam could almost have laughed and cried at the very sight of him standing there.

All he did, however, was to make a confession. "The whole thing, you know, isn't real to me yet. In fact, this morning it seems more fantastic than ever, and sometimes I feel as if I were dreaming or had walked into some daft historical tale."

Mr. Hooby considered this statement very gravely. "Well," he said, slowly, "that's a very interesting reaction of yours, Mr. Stewart." And for a moment he looked as if he were about to give Adam so many marks or even a small prize for it. "It's certainly never taken me that way, but then I've been what you might call a fairly active member of this movement for some time now, and so it seems to me one of the liveliest things going. I'll say now there are one or two big men over there I know, old man Slosson, Jim Tabb, and one or two more, who, if they got right onto this, would have us all inside Westminster Abbey with our coronation clothes on within the year. But it would just have to be their own proposition, and I don't see the romance holding out long once they sat in the chair. I'm thinking though, that these fellows of yours, with their new dressed-up titles, will be just big enough to spoil it, putting it over fine old aristocrats like Sir Arthur Baddeley-Fragge, but not big enough to run it through on their own."

"But surely they can't spoil it—and I suppose you mean change the atmosphere of the movement—while the Baron's more or less in command?" Adam had no sooner asked this question that he saw Helen coming round the corner of the house.

"Well, the Baron's a real big man, and if he doesn't know what roam-ance is, then I can't tell you where you're going to learn." There was more of this from Mr. Hooby, but now Adam was entirely engrossed by a little comedy that was taking place on the lawn. One of the fattest of the magnates was puffing after Helen in a vain attempt to overtake her. She did not appear to be moving very quickly, or to be aware that anyone was behind her, but after watching her for a few moments, Adam was convinced that she knew as much as he did. She sailed across the lawn, walked round several flower-beds, then turned away and fluttered in and out of the bushes, without any sign of haste, and contriving her movements so that the panting and purple-faced gentleman was just kept lumbering hopefully in pursuit. Finally he had to stop, and the cream and cherry-coloured dress disappeared behind a bright tangle of leaves. It had all been done so dexterously that Adam could have shouted his approval. It had, too, seemed oddly significant, perhaps because the two personages in it were so distinctly opposed, their action so clear-cut, their figures so neatly picked out against the uniform background of lawn and leaf, that the little incident had the air of being a dramatized fable.

"If you ask me," said Mr. Hooby, reflectively,

"I should say that our friend Lord Lochferry started to catch up with that girl at least twenty-five years too late."

"Is that Lochferry?" And Adam stared across at the man, who was still puffing and blowing, but who pretended now to be dividing his interest between his cigar-case and the neighbouring flower-beds. There was still something unreal about him, as if his figure had dropped out of a series of pictures illustrating some old-fashioned allegory.

"It is. He's in cotton. I've met him before. Most times he manages to catch up with the girls, but I should say that Mrs. Maythorn's too light in the foot and clear in the head for him. It's time I was moving." He looked at his watch. "I shall have to hustle round. If I stand here much longer, I shall forget that this is our big day. We're expecting noos of that young man this morning, and the Baron may have heard something now. See you later, Mr. Stewart."

Mr. Hooby thereupon carried away his round face and round spectacles to dwell upon other phenomena, and left Adam alone with his midsummer of bright lawns and flashing birds. He lit a pipe and idly moved over the grass, lounging before the burnished screen of the morning but gradually losing himself in a reverie in which the whole situation, the mounting adventure and fantastic c
all the personages in it, spar
day itself. Occasional thoug
through this reverie like the
eyes still tried to follow. He
pulse, throbbing behind the

petal and leaf and fluttering birds, and that this pulse was gathering speed. Anything and everything might happen now; events not thought of and therefore never deflowered by anticipation might suddenly blossom riotously; for here at last was a day that could outstrip those headlong and predatory dreams of his.

Then something came crashing through this monstrously heightened mood of expectancy and told him that he was a fool. Perhaps it was the sight of Mrs. Belville bearing down upon him. Nothing could be worse for a young man than such idling, she cried to him, and he must immediately leave off dreaming in the sunshine and find Helen for her. Helen and her car were required to fetch some things from Semper. Perhaps Adam would like to go, too, to fetch and carry in the town. He and Helen would find her somewhere in or near the hall, up to her knees in the sixes and sevens to which everything that morning had been reduced. After saying all this as if she were merely a worried middle-aged woman playing extra housekeeper for a day and not a good fairy, Mrs. Belville hurried back to the house, and Adam trod the golden air in search of Helen.

He found her among the white roses bending to them a face that glowed like rich ripe fruit. When he was very near, she looked up and smiled at him, and his heart leaped at this merry friendly glance. He remembered that pursuit across the lawn; he at least was not unwelcome. Already, he swore, there was some link between them, as if his morning's thoughts about her had fluttered and called round

THE MIDSUMMER DAY'S DREAM

her head as she had leaned over these roses, their friendship growing mysteriously outside ordinary communication, growing just as this sun was climbing up the sky. His delivery of the message was very sedate and her reception of it very demure, but their eyes were dancing together to some secret tune. Yes, she would go, and of course he could go with her, to fetch and to carry, but first they must each take an armful of white roses to the house. Thus they walked back together with midsummer in their arms, their heads above a cloud of blossom.

"Of course you knew there was someone behind you when you last crossed the lawn?" Adam inquired of her.

She laughed. "Did you see that? Of course I knew. I knew who it was, too. Luckily he was too fat to catch up. I didn't want to have to talk to such a disgustingly fat creature on a morning like this. I loathe those fat men." And she actually gave a little shudder.

He considered this for a moment. "I don't know that that's quite fair. But I don't think people are fair to fatness. It's not necessarily disgusting, you know." Lean as a rake, he felt nobly disinterested. "After all, the Baron's very fat, and you don't find him disgusting and loathsome and all the rest of it, do you?"

"Heavens, no! I've adored him for years." Her face put on a little frown. "And now that I think of it, I've known other fat people I've liked enormously and not found at all disgusting."

"It may be, of course, just because one knows them," Adam threw in, while she was still puzzling it out.

"There are two kinds of fatness," she went on. "Yes, that's it. And one's disgusting and the other's quite jolly."

"Well, but fat's fat, you know, whoever wears it, so to speak." He paused a moment to think. "Perhaps it's a question of personality, what's behind the fat."

She took it up triumphantly. "That's just what it is. I see it now. It all depends on the size of the personality. Some fat men are obviously nothing but mean little creatures who have allowed themselves to be buried in masses of flesh, and they're the disgusting ones. But the others, like the Baron, have to be enormous because they're really enormous themselves inside, so that their fatness is only a kind of richness that's really part of them working itself out in terms of flesh. Those people are fascinating and never loathsome, and you must have noticed that they're always tremendously alive and quite agile however bulky they are. The Baron's like that; you feel that a smaller body wouldn't do for him at all; he must have a colossal helping of everything."

They agreed wonderfully about this, and between them, by the time they had reached the hall, they had settled for ever the question of fatness and fatness. Mrs. Belville came pouncing out upon them, waved away their roses, and flung at them all manner of commissions and directions, which Adam sorted out and tidied up, with the help of pencil and paper, while Helen went round to the garage at the far end

THE MIDSUMMER DAY'S DREAM

of the house for her car. This was the big touring Vauxhall that had rescued him from the inn at Gloam, and now Adam greeted it in the sunshine as if it were a long-lost friend. It was a very solid and sedate machine, but he heard it purring vague promises of adventure, and the very sound of its horn was like the opening of the Fifth Symphony. To climb in and sit beside Helen, knowing that you were to be there together for the next hour or so, was an adventure in itself, an experience as rich as nougat.

Another second and they would have been moving off, but a cry from the house arrested Helen. They looked up to see the Baron's nose and fantastic little imperial. He seemed colossal as he stood there smiling down upon them. "You're the very people I wanted to see, my children," he remarked. "Where are you going?" After they had told him, he went on: "Everything begins to-day, as you know. To-night, after dinner, there will be a meeting in the library, and if I can bring in the heir himself to meet these people here, then the rest is easy. I've just heard now on the telephone—it's quite safe because we use a code, one I invented myself, very rich and strange; I must explain it to you sometime—well, I've just heard that he may get through to-day. I've just heard, too, that Hake has left the dale, perhaps in disgust after yesterday's fiasco. Now I expect the heir to ring me up, probably from Gloam Junction, just to say that he's there, sometime this evening, probably during the meeting. I must stay behind to keep the thing going, so I'd like you, Helen, to have

the car ready so that you can jump in when I give you the word, rush off to Gloam Junction, or wherever the place is, and return with the hope of England in the back seat. Adam here, who has such an eye for Scotland Yard, had better go with you. You'll be ready after dinner, then?"

Adam saw Helen and himself rushing through the moonlight, and blessed the colossus standing over him who, with a few casual instructions, could send the whole day rocketing. Helen, too, did not look displeased, but all she said was: "Baron, you shall be obeyed. But how shall I your true love know?"

"By his long dark face and his turned-down nose and his taste for epigram," the Baron lilted in reply. "He's not unlike our own Adam Stewart, only, of course, brighter and wittier and more beautiful. You may be sure he'll be the only person waiting at Gloam Junction with a marked taste for epigrams."

"No doubt," said Helen; "but it takes time to discover such tastes, and the wit may not easily sparkle on the platform of Gloam Junction."

The Baron wagged a fat finger in her face. "You're inclined to be crisp and severe this morning, my dear Helen, and for once I trace the family likeness between you and our excellent but intimidating Mrs. Belville. However, as a matter of fact, I've thought of that, and therefore—in the words of Bottom the Weaver—I have a device to make all well. When you think your man is before you, you will say to him: 'What is it that we all want?' Then he will reply: 'A Roland for an Oliver.'"

"And a most egotistical device, too!" cried Helen.

"I thought that you at least, Baron Roland, would never stoop to these typical masculine vanities."

"I think I see a startled look in your eye, my dear Adam," said the Baron smoothly, "but you must never heed these grossly unfair criticisms: they are only the gnats that issue from the long summer of the feminine mind. As for my device, it is a password and counter-sign so simple that it can be remembered even by giddy youth. It is also a piece of gnostic, even oracular, wisdom, which you will understand when you are both old and grey and battered; though as I look at you now, I can hardly believe that you will ever be those things. Off you go, the pair of you, and be ready to-night." He turned an immense back on them, and in another minute they were gliding away.

The road was almost empty and by this time Helen had come to know every twist and turn of it, so that there was time for talk as they sped down the shining green length of the dale, running between hills that seemed only to be breathed against the sky. Happily they talked together of the Baron and of the lovely crazy things that were now shaping themselves, of what had gone and what might come, of all the people at Runner Hall and of all the odd folk that one or other of them had ever met; and they carried on this laughing exchange all the way down the dale, in and out of shops, and back again and through the late lunch they had together. It was inevitable that it should have been Helen he had seen first, with his foot on the threshold of this magical midsummer day, for this day, perhaps all days to come and all the crying wistful ghosts that had gone and

never listened to her laughter, belonged to her. All the show of events, all the people there, and all their talk and their plotting and their antics, seemed nothing now but a delicious comedy of her devising, moving to her music, a play of shadows in her eyes, a charade in the house of life to which she had invited him. Together they shared this fantastic dream of things, and even when they were separated, when she was out of sight, busy among the roses or lost in the house while he talked idly to some fellow guest, this sense of all things being their dream together did not desert him. So it was all through that day. Not that things now were less real than they had been to him, for however crowded and sumptuous the pageant of the hours had seemed to him before, he had always come at last to find it a shadow show and hollow phantasmagoria, to discover that he was really walking alone in an empty echoing space somewhere behind it all. Reality had simply been that final loneliness, and all else an hour's illusion hastening to defeat. But now that space behind was not empty, no longer did he walk there alone or desolately examine the ledgers of sensation. The old mocking illusion, the pageant that had vanished at one single cry of the heart, was now the quaint charade in which he and Helen happily took part, or the film they stared at as they sat close together in the darkened theatre of this inner life.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE MOONFLIGHT

HAVING marched with ever-increasing pomp through the three gateways of port, brandy and coffee, and having wandered with many a loud ha-ha through the fragrant jungle of cigar smoke, the men were now straggling out of the dining-room and moving towards the library, where the meeting was to be held. To Adam, the dinner had been a noisy, idle dream, through which he had nursed all manner of sweet muddled thoughts, chiefly of Helen, who had sat at the other side of the table, a radiant figure in crimson. He had hoped to have secured a place by her side, and because he had failed, through no fault of his, nor, he told himself, of hers, he had borne a grudge against the whole dinner and had determined that it should be a mere flicker on the surface of his attention. As course followed course, as the stream of wine quickened from sherry to champagne and finally ebbed away in the dark and somnolent tide of port, as the talk grew louder and swifter and the laughter rang out, under cover of the idlest masquerade of interest he hugged to himself, gloated over, those glances of Helen's that came to rest so exquisitely upon him from time to time. They alone meant something. For the rest, everything now hung on his taking his place by her side for the remainder of the evening, and that place he meant to have if he had to fight his way to it,

unless, of course, she herself refused it to him. But that was unthinkable, a whole new world crashing to ruin.

No doubt the affair had gone off splendidly. Even Mrs. Belville had had rising hopes of it. "My dear Adam, I'm really beginning to believe a little in this conspiracy," she had told him between tea and dinner, "for a society that can dine as this one will to-night is not altogether fantastic and ephemeral. Seven excellent courses; Veuve Cliquot and Pol Roger, both sweet and dry; and three extra waiters, most sober and respectable men that Siddell has discovered at Lobley and brought over in a car; all these things are not to be lightly dismissed, and suggest, for one evening at least, a certain solidity in this absurd cause. The Baddeley-Fragges have risen to the occasion, though I must say that Siddell and I should also receive congratulations."

"I came here originally, you know, to stay in little country inns," he had said to her, "and I've no things here. I hope we're not supposed to dress to-night?" It was queer how fatuous little remarks of this kind remained, with all their attendant circumstances, in the memory. That moment kept returning to him and he could hear himself saying again: "I hope we're not supposed to dress to-night?" Perhaps he would remember it years hence, when all manner of important events had faded from remembrance. But she had left him easy in mind by replying: "No, as so many people are merely on the wing, the men aren't asked to dress."

Now it had come and gone, no doubt a very fine

THE MOONLIGHT

dinner indeed, under the circumstances, probably a most successful function. But to him it had been a mere idle interlude, a buzz of talk and a tinkling of glasses, and the real evening was beginning now that he had crossed this wilderness of time, nearly half an hour, since he had seen Helen vanish amid a rustle of silks and they were all moving over to the library. The mere thought of this move had excited him before, but now, as he actually went through the door, a strange calm took possession of him.

He had never been in the library before. It was a long low-ceilinged room facing the drawing-room across the hall, its windows looking out upon the semi-circular sweep of gravel before the front door. The walls were rich with books and prints and the glimmer of porcelain and old pewter. All the treasures of the morning, white roses and the belated lilac, were heaped in dim old willow-pattern bowls, and the darkening air was heavy with their fragrance. Above the cavernous fireplace, which was not far from the door and at the narrow end of the room, were clusters of slim candles, unlighted as yet, clear-cut against the panelling; and here and there were tiny constellations of silhouettes, and old portraits, just a dull gleam of gold round indistinguishable faces. Adam stood for a moment at the door, idly noting these and other details, but above all absorbing the atmosphere of the place. Not only was this library the largest room in the house, it was also the loveliest, a room that seemed much older than all the others, brimmed with an antique grace and kindness, so that looking into it, remarking its

exquisite memorials of the past, the flotsam and jetsam stranded on its shore, you seemed to hear the ebbing of the slow kindly tide of years. And now to-night, after a long silence, it was to be plunged into the world of affairs. It looked half-hearted, almost afraid.

A table had been placed a little way in front of the fireplace, and there were two or three chairs behind this table. All the others, with a settee or two, were ranged in front, and now gaped expectantly, with an unavoidable suggestion of amateur theatricals. Most of the women had already entered but had not yet taken their places. They were grouped at the back of the room, chattering. The rest of the men, with the exception of the Baron, Sir Arthur and Siddell, had come crowding in after Adam and were now talking together or wandering about the room, peering here and there, in the aimless fashion of all people summoned to a strange apartment and left idle for a time. At last the group of women at the other end dissolved, and Adam saw the scarlet detach itself from the multi-coloured mass of silks. Helen turned to survey the room, looked meaningly at Adam, and after gracefully eluding one or two detached males, moved slowly down the far side of the room towards the nearer window. Adam, now one great heart-beat, joined her. She patted the window-seat.

"I'm going to sit here," she said softly.

"Then so am I," he announced with decision, though his voice was a trifle husky. "I'll bag a few cushions."

THE MOONLIGHT

They settled themselves comfortably in the window. Adam was almost afraid to speak lest some chance word should break the spell that brought them so close together.

Helen looked out through the open window and he followed her glance. There, not three yards away, was her car. They had only to swing out their legs, take two strides, and they were in it. "It's all ready," she said, very quietly. "That's why I thought we'd sit here. If we're wanted—well, out we go, without any fuss. And somehow I feel that we shall be. Something's going to happen."

"I hope so." He looked at her and then smiled, very shyly, and was rewarded by the tiny dimple she now knew so well. She leaned forward on one rounded arm, and together they looked out through the serene air, the chatter of the others dying away behind them.

"It's going to be a lovely night," she whispered.

The garden was dreaming in that lingering half-light he had noticed before here at this hour, when the long midsummer day seemed to lighten suddenly and then remain pallid and still before it finally flickered out. The distant hill that could be seen beyond the garden's jagged and darkening horizon of leaf was dusted with plum-bloom, and not very far above the last blue line was the rim of the rising moon, a wisp of pale gilt tissue.

"What a curious light this is!" he said. "Not ordinary twilight at all. There's something queer, unearthly, about it."

Helen nodded. "Yes, it can be quite frightening

sometimes. It's too pale and quiet; you feel there's something sinister going on behind it. I've noticed it particularly up here, and it seems the people round here have a name for this light. They call it 'edge o' dark'. Isn't that just the name for it?"

"Edge o' dark," he murmured, and suddenly saw the world as an eerie place.

"Yes, we're sitting on—or is it 'in'?—the edge o' dark." And she showed him enormous, solemn, brown eyes, glimpses of hollow night, through which, however, her adorable laughing self contrived to peep. "Let us see what is happening to the conspirators."

They faced about and saw that nearly everyone now was seated. "Isn't it queer," Helen whispered, "how all the people in little audiences, at meetings like this or tiny church services or musical evenings, always look absurd and rather shamefaced, as if they knew they were ridiculous, whereas the people in huge audiences, who are usually still more ridiculous, are entirely unconscious of the fact and always look grand and important?"

"What a delightful room this is!" Adam exclaimed, staring about him again.

"Like a lovely old tune," she replied. "I've always adored it. It belongs to the really old part of the house, you know, and it's the only really civilized thing for miles."

"It doesn't seem very keen on this meeting," he remarked, eyeing the room reflectively.

"How delightful of you to notice that!" She sparkled at him. "Of course it doesn't. It looks like

an aristocratic old lady on a visit to her stockbroker's. The 'lards', of course, are entirely out of place."

"And yet, you know," Adam began, enjoying the very sound of his own voice, deliberate, friendly, so sure of the sensitive listener, "and yet, after all this is no ordinary meeting. If long-lost Stuarts are to turn up, walking in from the night to ask for the crown, this is the very place for them."

"I should think it is. Can't you see the pale, clear-cut, regal profile against that dark panelling? What a pity it isn't going to be Bonnie Prince Charlie, complete with bonnet, kilt, and white cockade! I've tried hard, but I really can't imagine what this young man will be like. And the Baron can't—or won't—describe him."

"All I know about him," Adam blurted out, not altogether happy about her interest in this romantic young stranger, "is that he has been a conjurer."

A soft little trill of laughter came from Helen. "A conjurer! Who told you that?"

"The Baron." He felt a little guilty now. "It was in confidence, and I ought not to have repeated it."

"But he told me, also in confidence," Helen cried softly, "that this young man is—or had been—an officer in the merchant service. I remember remarking how glad I was, because I adore sailors. He could hardly be both, could he?"

Adam shook his head meditatively. "There's something queer about all this. I've thought so from the first."

"I too. It's just like the Baron. I believe nothing now until I actually encounter this mysterious

youth. It would not surprise me if ——” her voice trailed away. They looked at one another for a moment or so, wandered hand-in-hand through vast regions of eternal doubt. Then she whispered, with an air of disclosing the most delicious secret in the world: “I don’t really care, though. It’s been delightful, and so long as the Baron has it in hand, it will go on being delightful. Without him, nothing would ever happen here. And look!—it’s all beginning.” And she settled herself in her corner with a tiny jump, clasping her hands in her lap, and was at once so lovely and charmingly sophisticated, and yet so like an eager little girl at a show, that Adam could have cried out his adoration, bellowed forth her name and the marvellous quality of her, to the whole room.

The butler was lighting all the candles above the fireplace, moving slowly from sconce to sconce with a taper and leaving behind him yellow constellations, unwavering in the windless air. Two waiters covered the table with a green baize cloth and arranged pens, ink, blotting-pads and paper upon it. A third arrived, followed by the Baron, Sir Arthur, and Siddell, and heaped a multitude of papers and three small dispatch boxes upon the table. The Baron added two attaché cases. Then the butler took down two lighted candelabra and set one at each end of the table. All this was performed in complete silence and with a deliberation of movement that suggested ritual or the setting of a stage after the curtain had been raised. Helen watched these proceedings with eyes that grew darker in the deepening candle-light.

"You know," she whispered, "there ought to be soft music going on somewhere just outside—something by Scarlatti for harpsichord and strings. Isn't it a perfect light for eighteenth-century comedy?"

"It's a perfect light for anything," said Adam, looking at her intently.

"I feel that at any moment," she went on, softly, "a patched and powdered lady in lilac satin will enter, followed by a maid with cherry-coloured ribbons, who will hand her a note and then admit a gentleman in salmon silk, perhaps one of those there." And she nodded towards the portraits, no longer indistinguishable. Adam looked at them idly. One stood out, being nearer and clearer than the others, the head and shoulders of a long-nosed, tight-lipped fellow in a wig and a blue coat and with a crisp little eye and a lean but crimson cheek, who probably commanded a frigate in the old French wars when Nelson was a lad, and had gone goutily to the grave more than a hundred years ago, being nothing now but a portrait and a name in a churchyard. To Adam he was not even a name, just a face on the wall stared at in an idle moment. But though so many faces, faces that had talked with him and smiled when he smiled, were to pass out of his mind, this face he was not to forget, and many a time afterwards it returned to him, vivid in that lost candle-light, and always brought with it such a queerly poignant feeling that at last it seemed to him that he and this dead-and-gone unknown had companioned one another through some long ordeal.

But now he turned from the faces of pigment on

the wall to the irradiated face, warm flesh and blood yet glamorous as a dream, so near to him. He glanced at feature after feature, quite coolly, for now it seemed to him that these were not her very self but only something that she wore, a vesture of subtly modelled and coloured flesh, and that it was not they themselves, but what shone through them, that so strangely excited him. Emboldened by this thought and by some hint of urgency in the hour, he said to her, softly but with decision: "Helen Maythorn, your nose has the tiniest tilt at the end of it, and the dimple in your left cheek is slightly larger than the one in your right, and sometimes your mouth seems very small and sometimes quite big, and you have one strand of hair that always looks as if it wanted to come down but never does . . ." He broke off. She was looking at him, almost through him, very haughtily. He began to be alarmed.

Then she melted. "Adam Stewart, once a wandering knight and now merely an impudent boy, your nose is long and rather crooked, and the point of your chin is not in line with it, but wanders away to the right, and one of your eyebrows is slightly higher than the other, and you have a little mole on the left side of your neck, and your hair, though not bad on the whole, is not very nicely trimmed at the back. And that, I think, is quite enough of that." And she tilted her chin and looked away from him, sweet indifference itself, leaving him to gasp at this rapid and astonishing catalogue. Who would have thought that she had noticed anything about him, let alone these details?

"Helen, my dear." It was the Baron standing before them. "I have never seen you looking lovelier. You might be sitting with the dusk of Ilium behind you. Every time I've looked across at you, I've heard those thousand ships crashing into the water. And if this is what an old man, with a battered antique heart now bound in brass, can feel about you, I tremble to think to what state of mind you've reduced this young man sitting by your side." And then lowering his voice: "I take it you're ready if that bell should ring?" He was shown the car waiting outside. "Admirable! I've held up this conference as long as I could in the hope of hearing that telephone. Now we shall have to begin. And if he can't get here to-night, all this will have been so much wasted time. Our friends, the new arrivals, insist upon seeing him before they make the slightest move. They demand—two of them told me so—what they call 'the goods'. I am asked to deliver, for the first time in my life, 'the goods'. These people, you know, have spent all their years wanting and getting these goods of theirs. They have always lived in a warehouse and not in a world. They and I speak two different languages."

Helen regarded him steadily. "Baron," she said softly, "you're not happy about things to-night, my dear."

Coughs that were like nudges, murmurs of impatience, now came from behind his back. "Perhaps I have listened too long for the little stroke of a bell," he said. "I feel an ebbing some-

where to-night. But let us take heart, my dear. You will always be shining there outside things, illuminating them, and I will always be in the very thick of it inside, and neither of us can be removed or changed. And as for Adam Stewart here, who is listening to my words, but half in a dream, staring at your face, let us hope that he will always be where he is now, sitting between us, listening to me, dreaming over you, with a hand for each of us. And now the show begins."

He went to the table and took his place there with Sir Arthur and Siddell. There was a general shuffling of chairs and feet as the company settled itself to listen. Adam ran his eye over the little assembly. There were a few people sitting between him and the table, and these were only so many bent heads, but all the others were plainly visible from the window-seat. A queer crew! Yet for all but the newcomers he began to feel an affection as face after face caught his glance. They began to wear the look of old friends: Lady Baddeley-Fragge, sitting there in a thin faded dream; the foolish eager face of Miss Satterly; the wooden Major, bolt upright; Templake, nervous, fidgeting, waiting for the world to be saved; Hooby, moonishly contemplating this new little alcove in the museum of life; Lady Matchways, looking fragile and indomitable to the last, unable to conceal her impatience at having to sit there doing nothing; and Mrs. Belville, demure of mouth but commanding two bright blue eyes that missed nothing and could be almost heard reporting to their resolute and humorous captain. Adam had

a sudden daft desire to go round and shake them all by the hand.

Sir Arthur stood up, a brittle figure, and cleared his throat. "Ladies and Gentlemen," he began, with almost luxurious ease. But then he stopped, looked across at Helen as if he had a vague idea that she ought not to have been there, fumbled for his eyeglasses, and then went on: "Er—this is, as I am sure most of you are aware, er—the greatest moment in the history of our society, the Companions of the Rose. Indeed, our work—our real work—begins now. Before this—er—conference ends to-night, it will have become a great historic occasion." At which Helen, without taking her eyes off the speaker or moving a muscle of her face, gave Adam a lightning nudge. "Our—er—general policy, the lines on which we must—er—work from now onwards, will be discussed by Baron Roland, but before he begins—er—I will call upon our new organizer, Mr. Siddell, to—er—make a statement regarding the—er—position of the society. In view of the increased—er—work, it was decided to appoint a professional organizer, sympathetic to the cause, of course, whose duty it would be—er—to appoint and—er—control agents in various parts of the country, and—be responsible for the finances and—er—so forth. Mr. Siddell came to us with—er—the very highest references, and though he has—er—only been with us a few days, we have—er—every reason to be more than satisfied with—er—what he has already accomplished." Here there was some applause, led by Mrs. Belville, who obviously had in mind the dinner

arrangements and the extra waiters. "I will now," said Sir Arthur, "call upon Mr. Siddell to make his statement."

Siddell sprang to his feet and walked round to one side of the table, standing with his back to the door and facing the whole company. To Adam's astonishment, he had leaped at one bound from being a pale mystery into a real and very decided person. He had hardly opened his mouth before you seemed to see his personality taking shape and colour. His eyes snapped at them. There was an edge to his voice.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began, his glance swiftly travelling round the room. "I'm delighted to learn that you are pleased with my work here. I'm not dissatisfied with it myself, though it has been far more difficult than any of you imagine." He paused for a moment, smiling, while one or two of his audience gasped at the conceit of this young man. "It's a pleasure to me to explain to you the present position of this society. You have been told that this is the greatest moment in its history. That is true. It is, I think, also its last. No, sir, kindly keep your seat," he cried sharply, turning round and flinging out a long forefinger at the Baron, who had uttered a cry and sprung to his feet, comprehension dawning in his face.

"Come in," Siddell cried. The door behind him immediately opened, and there, crowded in the doorway were the three waiters, and standing behind them, peeping in and grinning over their shoulders, were Hake and Sergeant Rundle. A hundred little suspicions that had been lurking some time at the

THE MOONLIGHT

back of Adam's mind now rushed together to become one screaming certainty. So this was the end of it all.

"Now please keep your seats," Siddell commanded. "We have power to arrest any person who interferes with us in any way. I may also point out that we are armed, though it ought not to be necessary to mention the fact in this company. But to resume my statement. I have a complete record of the activities of this society and of all the persons engaged in those activities, and this record will be handed over to the authorities who sent me here—with such splendid references. Not only that, but the young gentleman you were expecting to-night will not arrive; he has been conducted elsewhere."

His audience had been merely bewildered before, but now there broke out a hubbub of dismay, so that he was compelled to stop. He raised his hand for silence, but without effect for some time. After resuming his seat, the Baron had been sitting stonily, one arm resting on the table, a monument of frustration, but now, during this loud, confused interval, he raised his head, Adam noticed, and looked meaningfully across at the two of them perched on the window-seat. Then the hand on the table lifted a finger, very deliberately, as if it were a signal. What did it mean? Had Helen seen it, too? He glanced at her and their eyes met to read the same question and answer. Neither knew what was meant by that lifted finger, but the sight of it had made them both suddenly rigid, tense, with a new watchfulness.

At last Siddell contrived to silence the dismayed

assembly and went on with his speech. "The recent activities of this society," he observed smoothly, "have obviously long passed the point at which they might be tolerated by the authorities. Historical sentimentalism is one thing, and active conspiracy against the existing order quite another thing. In any other country most of you would now have considerable terms of imprisonment to look forward to, but the authorities have decided to proceed leniently. On this occasion they will not prosecute, but I have been instructed to say that any further activities of this kind on the part of anyone present here to-night will be regarded and dealt with as a very serious offence." He surveyed them coldly, his tones the very voice of formal authority. "No further meeting of the society must take place, and after to-night there will be no more Companions of the Rose; all its papers will be confiscated; it is finished."

"Not yet!" roared the Baron, leaping to his feet. "Catch this!" He picked up an attaché case and hurled it across to Adam, who as he caught it heard the final command: "Now run!" It was all over in three seconds. The place was now in an uproar, all of them jumping to their feet, Siddell shouting to his men and trying to push his way through a huddle of chairs and people.

The moment Adam had caught the case, Helen had cried "Come on!" and had immediately swung herself out of the window and leaped into the car. Adam followed her and flung himself and the case into the back. It was her own familiar car and Helen moved like lightning, but inevitably some moments

were lost while she started the engine and threw in the gear, and the car had only just begun to move when someone—it must have been Siddell—came flying through the window and jumped for the footboard. But Adam, leaning forward at the back and dancing with impatience, gave the fellow a hard push before he had time to grasp the side and sent him reeling back. Above the noise, as they shot forward, Adam heard a peal of laughter from the room behind: it sounded like Mrs. Belville. As the car turned towards the drive, rocking as it gathered speed, Adam looking back saw two men come running out of the front door, and waited for their onset, gloriously full of battle now and determined not to be stopped if all Scotland Yard jumped on the footboard. But the men were too late. There was a click of gears; the car jerked forward and ate up the drive; and a minute later they were streaming down the road.

Helen switched on the lights and steadily accelerated, only slowing up a little when she turned a sharp corner, where a signpost pointed the way to Lobley, but after that speeding up along a fairly straight ascent for about two miles. So far they had not exchanged a word. Helen was busily engaged with the car, and Adam, still sprawling at the back, had no inclination to disturb her. Never before had he felt so exhilarated: the glorious minute at the window, the rushing air, the lovely wide night spreading before him, and Helen there, always Helen, winging him out of that disastrous collapse into their own free leagues of moonlight, the two of them crashing

through those narrowing, closing walls, bursting out of what you could call Siddellism, into a flight that was like a fairy tale; under these strokes of fortune his mind went happily reeling. At first he had been dazed, his mind still wandering in the ruins of the evening's conference, the cold even tones of Siddell, the Baron's cry, still lodging in his ears, but now with every flying yard and swelling minute of their escape together, its splendour grew. Its promise filled the wide sweet-smelling space, the old enchanted palace of midsummer night, whose lovely things, the carpet of the fields, the faded dark-green tapestry of hills, the great golden crazy lamp swung in the blue, grew lovelier still.

At the summit of the road, she stopped the car and stood up, turning towards him and holding out her arms. Staring, he caught his breath. She gave a little gasp, and then he saw that she was shivering. "*I am cold,*" she said. "You'll find a coat of mine there somewhere, and an old hat." He handed them over. "This, of course, is absolutely mad," she went on, slipping on her coat, "but I wouldn't have missed it for worlds. I suppose they'll be coming after us?"

"Oh, certain to do," he replied. "They've got one car of their own and could easily commandeer one of the others."

"I believe I can hear something. Yes, look!" She pointed down the road; lights were flashing round the distant corner. "Two cars there, travelling quickly, too. It's almost sure to be Siddell and company. I hope he's raging. Come and sit in front."

He climbed over and took his place by her side.

THE MOONLIGHT

She sent the car humming down the long, easy descent, gathering speed all the way. At the bottom she asked him to look round and see if they were visible yet over the hill. He turned but saw nothing, and it was not until they were half-way up the next slope, which mounted to a gap in the fells, that he saw the lights on the hill behind. "There they are now!" he cried. "They must be dropping behind." He thought he saw her smile at him as he knelt there on the seat, an excited and happy fugitive.

"We should be able to outrun them," she said, reflectively.

"Oh, easily, with this car!" He might have just made it himself for her.

"But that hill will have slowed them down, and now they have a chance of making it up again."

"Well, this hill will slow them down again; and it's worse than the other one."

"Yes, but I want to leave them well behind now." She had to raise her voice. "There's a cross-roads at the other side of this hill and I don't want them to see which way we take. They'll think we've gone straight on, through Lobley, whereas we'll cut off to the left and miss Lobley altogether."

"A great scheme!" he shouted, for now they were roaring up the last and steepest part of the hill.

It was strange how this exchange of brief impersonal remarks affected him. These ordinary loose phrases, spoken without feeling, casually flung from one to the other, seemed to him, the moment they had gone, utterances of the deepest significance, things whispered at the very core of life. Their

ADAM IN MOONSHINE

commonplace air was the merest disguise, for they were a part of the night, and this was a night of innumerable dimensions, doubly and trebly burdened with fatefulness; it gave you glimpses of layer after layer of meaning; and the lightest thing in it cast strange troubling shadows. Not that he really saw those shadows until afterwards, for now he had found happiness and, of course, did not know that he had found it, did not know that he was carrying it with him, rushing through the air, a ball of thinnest blown glass balanced on his hand.

They sped over the hill and then down the grey river that their own twin moons transformed into flashing walls and dust and leafage and then hurled into space. At last the cross-roads shone before them, and they turned to the left down a narrower winding road that only went jogging past them.

Standing up, Adam could see the last summit they had crossed. "Their lights are not even showing over the hill," he proclaimed triumphantly.

"That gives us a chance then," she replied, preoccupied with the twisting road.

They passed through a tiny village, so remote from sound or movement that it might have been in a toyshop window. Just outside a single pedestrian lifted a blank face to their lamps and then was gone, leaving them an empty road. Not a word was spoken now between them as they went softly throbbing into the blue bubble of the night. Helen sat quietly behind her wheel, guiding their little world along its narrow winding way. Adam was silent by her side, sometimes turning from the passing glimmer

THE MOONLIGHT

of tree and field to glance at her, and soon this became for him a dream-like double journey. Everything thinned out and melted into one vague mass that was half a mood and half a blur of sensation. Never could he have told how many miles and minutes they left behind them on that road. The engine softly drumming beneath his feet and the moon sailing above his head kept time for him and measured their conquered space, but all the while these things were receding and turning into sounds and sights wavering in the background of a dream. The Helen sitting by his side was now only a dark shell, for it seemed that her real being, the unique spirit of her, had escaped and expanded until it broadened out over the whole of his world and became at last its very atmosphere. His sense of her, was itself a soft radiance, filtering through his vague vision of things, and so he sailed on through a moonlight he had not known before.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE LAST ESCAPE

WHEN he wakened again to the outer world, they had come to the end of that narrow winding lane at last, and were now turning to the right down a straight, gleaming highway. Immediately everything was changed. No longer was Helen a mystery abroad in the night, but a warm, breathing girl at his side. She, too, must have felt some change in the atmosphere, for she stirred, shook herself a little, glanced casually about her while the car went placidly down the easy road.

"Where are we going?" Adam asked.

"And why are we here?" she laughed. Then eagerly, as if newly released from some prohibition of speech, they fell to talking of the night's adventure. They described to one another all the events of the meeting, took the whole affair up in their hands and twisted it this way and that, and happily compared their sensations at every stage of the proceedings. Adam upbraided himself for having kept so quiet about Siddell, of whom, he declared boldly, he had been suspicious from the very first. Helen brooded, half tenderly, half mockingly, over the whole field of stricken Companions.

"I wonder what the Baron is doing, poor darling!" she mused.

"Thinking out a new conspiracy for somewhere, I hope," Adam said fervently. "He was glorious at

the end. If it hadn't been for him, we shouldn't be here now."

"Why, do you like being here now?" She showed him an innocent profile.

"It's the most marvellous thing that's ever happened," he cried. "I wouldn't be elsewhere for worlds. And you said that yourself some time ago."

"Did I?" There was mocking music in the query. She was now steering them through a village, and they almost went the whole length of it before she resumed. "Well, I should have hated giving in to that man Siddell, doing nothing but just sitting there gaping under his supercilious nose and those pale, cold eyes of his. At least he won't be quite so sure of himself now, and we've had fun, besides having saved valuable dispatches or records or whatever there is in that bag from the police. It's obviously the end of the society and the great conspiracy and everything, but the Baron and you and I have prevented it from being a tame ending. And now, I suppose, Master Adam, you and I are the last Companions of the Rose."

"Except, you know, that I never really was one," he put in, very happy, though, at the conjunction he suggested.

"And now, when I think of it, neither was I," she said. "I only came in as a sort of ally at the last moment, having heard so much about it from Uncle Geoffrey and Peter, and dying to see the Baron again and to join in one of his crazy affairs." They went smoothly on for a while in silence.

Adam had been trying to puzzle things out. "It's

odd, you know," he began, slowly, "that when the whole thing collapsed at the end almost at a touch from Siddell and his famous 'authorities,' I wasn't really surprised. Yet I ought to have been for I'd done so much dodging about with Hake and old Rundle, had eluded them so easily, that I had begun to think of them as a pair of old fools and everything they stood for, everything we were conspiring against, the whole law and order business, as something very clumsy and stupid and, you know, rather unreal. But it was there all the time, real enough, and waiting to pounce upon us; and, as I say, when it did pounce, in spite of my previous feeling about it, I wasn't really very surprised."

"I don't think, though," she said, now as serious as he was, "that what you call the law and order business, though, as you say, it's there all the time, apparently solid and enormous, and dangerous to despise or overlook, is as real as our plotting and planning and adventuring by moonlight. It seems so tremendous because everybody joins everybody else in pretending that it is, but it's not so real inside, you know. It's a mere convenience really, and not something to be happy about for its own sake; a sheer joy, like some kinds of work and play and relations with people, and so it doesn't actually take hold of life. Nor has it really crushed our society of the Rose, which, like the Baron, will pop up as something else very soon, even though it seems to have vanished now like a queer, lovely little dream."

"It hasn't really vanished with me," Adam said,

eagerly. "And now I see why." He paused for a moment.

"Tell me."

"Because you're with me, Helen. If I'd escaped by myself or with anyone else there, except the Baron, perhaps, it would have all collapsed now, would be just something to look back upon, but because you're here everything that was so glamorous and delightful about the conspiracy there, the fascinating spirit of the thing, still exists for me. I see that now."

She startled him by sounding the horn, though there was only a vacant length in front of them. "And I see, young man," she said, very sternly, "that you're on the very brink of making love to me."

"I'm not. At least"—he went on, confused but dogged, "I don't know whether I am or not. But I do know I'm trying to tell you honestly what I think about it all."

"You adorable child!" the bewildering creature exclaimed. And then, demurely penitent, she added: "I'm sorry, Mr. Stewart. Now tell me what you honestly think about it all."

The old feminine reducing glass was being held over him; he saw himself diminished to childishness; if he stopped, he must take refuge in a babyish, sulky silence, and if he went on, he would now be prattling at her knee. But he was determined to unburden himself.

"I see now that you began it all for me," he said slowly. "It was you who gave me the character, the

ADAM IN MOONSHINE

quality, of the thing, who covered it with glamour, crammed music and colour into it. The Baron, too, of course, did a lot in his own way, but that was afterwards. You know how one instrument in an orchestra, a lonely first violin or a clarinet high up somewhere, will suddenly announce a theme in the middle of a scramble of sound, and as soon as you hear it you know that that is the great theme, and that after all kinds of adventures it will gradually take hold of the whole orchestra and come thundering out at last as if it were the only tune in the world. Well, just the sight of you, and overhearing one or two of the funny little remarks you made, began it, announced that theme for me. When I remember the other afternoon—though it seems ages and ages ago, by the way—when I first saw you in St. Pancras ——”

“And now I, too, remember,” she interrupted, still looking ahead and nonchalantly turning her wheel, “I remember a very rude, staring young man at a carriage window. If I had thought for a moment . . .” And her voice departed into an Arctic silence.

“But surely you knew ——!” he began, alarmed. Then he saw that he was being teased. He ought to have seen it before, but it was strange how this girl contrived not only to deprive him of any mastery of a familiar situation, but to leave him floundering after her as if he were half-witted. But this was only on the surface, where mere tactics were of so much importance; underneath that, inside he had never felt so strong and wise before, r^u known

how easy it was to take all life between his two hands.

They went humming into a wood, and there, as the moonlight ebbed from the road and the dark foliage closed over their heads, he struggled again to beat out his thought. "You see, what seemed to me so fascinating in the cause itself I recognize now as the atmosphere you carry about with you, Helen. Not everything about it, because the Baron did something"—he hesitated a moment—"Peter, too, perhaps. The more obvious, adventurous part was theirs, but the real spirit of the affair, half poetry and half a lovely farce—like a midsummer night's dream—was something I saw dancing in your eyes and singing away in your voice there, right at the beginning, in St. Pancras. What I caught a glimpse of then was something I didn't understand then—I don't say I understand it properly now—but something that I was somehow desperately missing from life. I was absolutely miserable when you went away, and I told myself that it was because I wanted to be 'in' something—that's how I put it—and was never so delighted as when things began to happen. I've only realized to-day that it was really you who gave it all character, its colour and light; I didn't realize it before, not even when you came in that first night and gave me the rose, or the next morning when I heard you singing as you went through the hall. But I believe now that wherever you are, there too I should find that atmosphere. The conspiracy, or at least the happiest part of it, was only your—what shall I say?—quality, character, atmosphere, spirit,

translated into a sort of mad politics, into action, adventure. That's why to me there's really been no collapse—because you're still with me, or rather because I'm still by your side. I'm sorry, of course, about the Baron and—and Peter—and the others—though it doesn't matter about the Baron because I don't ever see him being defeated by anything, do you?—but you're here, and so the Siddells and the Hakes and the Canon Drewbridges have lost the last trick so far as I'm concerned." He ended weakly because a sudden sense of the unreality of his thought, or any thought, took possession of him. He heard his own voice idiotically going on, the drone of a daft phantasm, in that little inner night of the wood through which they cut their way with a broad scimitar of light.

"The wood opens out a little further along; there's a kind of glade," Helen said quietly, "and I'm going to stop there for a few minutes. I'm rather tired."

The question was dangerous—it might splinter the enchanted night—but he was compelled by something stronger than mere curiosity to ask it. "By the way"—and then he hesitated—"where are we going?"

"We're going home," she replied. "To my home, that is, which is only about fifteen miles or so further on, at a place called King's End. You must remember that besides being a Jacobite and a midnight fugitive, I'm a householder and ratepayer and a voter. Strictly speaking, I'm none of those things, not even a voter yet, but you know what I mean."

"Yes, I suppose I'd forgotten you were all those

things," he said slowly. "And so we're going to King's End? Well, it's obviously the place for the last two Companions of the Rose. Fateful name—King's End."

She had begun to slow up the car. "I hadn't thought of that," she confessed. "I believe it has that name because some Saxon king is supposed to have been killed there; I don't know which one, because I've never been able to take the slightest interest in Saxon kings."

"No, they're dull, I admit," he remarked, rather as if he was partly responsible for them, "though I remember being a furious partisan of theirs when I was at school. I was always dead against all invading Danes and Normans. Now I've forgotten all about the poor old Saxons."

Helen had now brought the car to a standstill at the side of the road, a few yards past the point where a broad woodland track ran across it. "This will do, I think," she said, "and now I'm getting out." They both descended and shook out their bodies until they were once more uncomplaining, upright forms. This was the little glade that Helen had mentioned. In full sunlight, with the ground burnished with gold and a soft green distance everywhere, you could have played *As You Like It* here, fleeing the time carelessly to your heart's content under these leaves. The grass and the unstirring woodland air were marvellously sweet-smelling; the old happy enchantment of the forest had not utterly vanished; but now there were only vague, broken glances of moonlight where the day's gold might have been

ADAM IN MOONSHINE

strewn along the ground, and deep shadow, black velvet dimly spangled here and there with leaf-shapes, where the woodland might have hung its far transparencies of green. Adam walked forward a few paces and then sat down upon a fallen log. Helen remained standing a little way off, nothing but a vague shape. For a minute or two they were as quiet as the trees: leagues of night bore down upon them.

"This is very lovely," Adam said at last, "but it makes me feel sad, I think. It's full of tiny whispering ghosts, and is all that's left of a long-lost Arcadia. I feel that we've come here a thousand years too late."

"You can feel that even though I'm here—and after all you've said!" It was her voice—there would never be another like it—and he heard in it the old faint mockery, yet it seemed to come as a whisper out of the immensity.

"It's because you're here, I think, I do feel it, a kind of curious lovely ache. If I were here alone, this place would be just a sickening desolation; and if anyone else but you were with me, it would probably be so many trees and yards of ground and so much night air, the last halt before we reached King's End. It's that, anyhow."

"It's what?"

"The last halt before we reach King's End," he repeated a little mournfully. "I don't like the sound of the phrase."

They were silent again. Then she stirred and a tiny voice said: "I wonder what there is in that bag?"

"Bag?" And then he laughed at himself. He had

forgotten the very existence of that attaché case whose rescue had first sent them out in flight together. "Oh, the case! Filled with papers, I suppose, the society's records, lists of people and what not, those documents that Siddell said he would confiscate."

"I wonder if it's locked?"

"Sure to be, I should think. The Baron must have attached great importance to it or he would not have sent us off with it."

"I want to look inside." It was the very voice of round-eyed innocence with just the subtlest suggestion of parody; and immediately it turned Adam into the clumsy, blustering male.

"Well, I don't know that we ought——" he began; then hesitated, and tried again: "You can't—it's sure to be locked."

"Even if it is locked, the key may be there," she said, coming closer. "We've every right to see what there is inside. We represent the society now, and we must know what it is we've rescued from Siddell, otherwise we shan't know what to do. There may be some instructions inside. The Baron may have been prepared for such an emergency as we've had to-night; it would be just like him to be and to give us all manner of romantic directions. I'm going to look inside if I can. Where is it?"

"I'll get it for you," said Adam, who returned to the car and, after some few moments' groping, discovered the attaché case where he had left it in the far corner of the back seat. Meanwhile, Helen had followed him to switch on the big headlights. "Bring

it over into the light," she commanded, still standing in the car. He walked round to the front and looked at the case in the full glare of the light.

"Is there a key?" she asked, looking down on him. He held up the tiny key that had been fastened to the handle. "There you are then!" she cried triumphantly. "That obviously means we're to open it. Quick now, Adam!" She hurried out of the car.

His curiosity now matched hers, for the case had rattled queerly as he had carried it round, and he unlocked it with all speed, bending over it in the light. "Well?" she cried, joining him as he stared down at the open case. Still amazed, he held it out for her to see.

"Two paper packets and a bottle," he announced, and looked at her in astonishment.

"Nothing else?" She poked about inside, but there was nothing beyond the two packets and the bottle.

"Are these the last records of the Rose Companions?" he asked, and they stared at one another and then again at the open case. "Perhaps these are documents disguised as a snack? The Baron might easily do that."

She shook her head. "No, I don't think they are. And this, I think, is just like the Baron." She took out the bottle and examined it. "It's wine," she trilled. "There's a label on it. Yes, it's a half-bottle of Chambertin."

"And these, I think, are sandwiches," said Adam, who had put down the case and was looking into the two paper packets. "Yes, they are! Sandwiches!"

THE LAST ESCAPE

She came peeping round. "What kind? Are they good? Bite one and see."

He was adrift, clutching the last spar of sober sense while crazy seas washed over him. But he found himself taking a bite and then crying: "Jolly good! Ham."

"Heavenly!" breathed the lovely creature, bending towards him; and then, as he looked into her great, shining eyes: "I adore ham."

"But what . . .?" he stammered, his last spar gone.

"We're going to eat them, of course," she cried. "Aren't you hungry? I am. They couldn't have arrived at a better time. And the wine, too!" She whisked away.

He gaped after her. "But I don't understand . . ."

"There's a little folding cup here somewhere," she was calling from the car. "What is it you don't understand? You shouldn't be always wanting to understand. Not that it matters, because one doesn't have to understand sandwiches, particularly ham sandwiches. Ah, here's the cup. Now bring the sandwiches along, and we'll have supper on that log."

As he crossed over with the food, still moonstruck, he thought he heard her laughing softly in the darkness. Then he leaped to a full and vivid perception of their situation; he saw the two of them there in this buried heart of the woodland, this night within a night, with their daft bag; his mind went running madly back through the hours, saw their flight with the case, re-lived their escape from the house at the first jangle of the fetters, heard the Baron's last great

roar; and as this phantasmagoria flashed by and he seemed to rock in the centre of a crazy world, there came to him a sense of the Baron's nearness, and the fantastic quality of the man seemed to fill the night until at last the very darkness, where so many strange things burgeoned, was nothing but his vast shadow. Then it seemed for a moment as if Helen, too, suddenly went towering to the stars with the Baron, so that the two were there, were everywhere, dividing all things between them, conjuring the dead planetary stuff into a million alluring shapes and giving it life with a breath. Was there not something the Baron had said, one of those odd significant remarks, something about his being between them . . . the Baron always in the thick of it inside . . . Helen always shining outside . . . ?

But now he was perched on the log, laughing away, and Helen was there at the other side of two packets of sandwiches and a bottle of wine, laughing with him. They told one another that by some last stroke of wizardry the Companions of the Rose had been transformed into so much bread and meat and cupfuls of wine, but they ate and drank none the less heartily for that, and to one of them, as the happy sacrament went on its way, the mystery of the rescued case, so loudly celebrated between them, dwindled beside the wonder of their being there together in the empty sighing chamber of the night. Something came to bless the bread, add savour to the meat, and enrich the wine most marvellously; and now for a little while his pressing feet found happiness beneath them solid as a rock. As they ate

THE LAST ESCAPE

and drank and talked so cosily together, he felt that he had at last burst through into another world. The old, hollow cheat had gone for ever. He remembered with a mingled pang of pity and contempt, that trumpery dilemma of the boy lingering outside the strange house in the night, that house which was always so enchanting from the outside and always so disillusioning within. It would be always like this, all days and nights, whatever was happening in them, would be like this past day and night, wherever Helen was. The magic of it would last for ever. Something that was not simply admiration nor wonder nor gratitude nor desire nor tenderness, but just a rush of strange emotion, came to shake body and mind together in one sweet and terrible grasp.

Their little meal was done and now they were standing up. She came closer to him, and he looked through the night into the deeper night of her eyes, now brooding over him. "You're shivering, Adam," she told him. "You're cold."

He had been cold this long time, but had forgotten about it. "No, it's not cold. It's just excitement—or delight—or something—at being here with you." And then it seemed some hoarse, foolish cry broke from him, and he called her name.

What was it that came murmuring from her lips, and what was it that happened then; the quick, light pressure of a hand, the soft passage of a cheek against his, the sudden drift of hair and a summer's fragrance across his face? He flung out his arms but only clasped empty air and dimming moonlight. She was standing there beyond his reach, once more a vague

shape, only a few yards away, but now it seemed as far from any grasp of his as a million miles could send her. Suddenly there came that hollow sensation somewhere in the pit of his stomach, and he began to feel a little giddy and sick, just as if he had been sent rushing down through space, and he dropped back on to the log and buried his head in his hands.

When he looked up again, quiet at last, she had returned to the car. "Are you ready now, Adam?" she called across to him, ever so gently. "I think we ought to be going."

He joined her without a word; but as her hand went out to the electric starter, he arrested it. "Before we go, Helen," he said very quietly, "tell me where this place is."

Her hand remained in his. "Why do you want to know?"

"Because I don't want it to float away into the blue once we have gone. I want to be able to take out a map, put my finger on a certain place and tell myself that once I was there and very happy. I want to be certain of the place, you see. As it is, I haven't the least idea where we are—the night's been all a jumble—or I wouldn't ask."

She looked at him for a moment before replying. "Perhaps it would be wiser not to drag it down from the blue and pin it to a map." He saw that she was smiling at him. "Perhaps it isn't on the map at all." But it was, and as she gently withdrew her hand, she told him where. Then she started the car, which immediately gave a curious jolt. There was a

crunching in the road. "What was that?" she cried. "Did we go over something?"

"That," Adam replied, after a moment's deliberation, "was a small attaché case, the property of Baron Roland, that was left lying in the road in front of the car." He had a vision of it lying there, flattened.

She nodded assent. "Shall we ——?" she had begun, but out of his mournful vision he told her it would be absurd to return for it. Its work was done and now it was only so much crushed leather lying in the road. Perhaps one day, though, Hake would find it and carry it to Siddell. He could see the two of them, surrounded by files and black tin boxes, surveying it with solemn eyes. "Off we go, then," said Helen, "to King's End."

The journey there was so much roaring darkness and a bright frieze of jumping, startled walls and trees and cottages, under cover of which Adam sat silent, half in a maze of fantastic recollections, half in an ebbing dream. At last, open gates and the narrow entrance to a drive sucked them up, and finally Helen brought the car to a standstill before a locked garage. Words, idle and fleeting as summer flies, lightly buzzed between them. She climbed out; he followed and saw her open the doors, drive home the car, turn the key upon it; but his eyes were as empty as if he were listening to distant music. Then she flitted away to the left, down some steps, and along a paved walk that brought them to the front of a low, stone house. He followed like a ghost. Another key turned in a lock, another door swung

ADAM IN MOONSHINE

open, a little groping, then a click and a flood of light, and King's End had received them.

She led him across the hall, through a door, and then clicked on more lights. He found himself blinking at a long low room that was full of bright fabrics and books and little pictures and seemed amazingly and distressingly brilliant and solid, a world away from the night outside. It made him feel suddenly very tired, and when, with a vague murmur, she quitted the room, he sank down into an easy chair and closed his eyes. The room fled and the night came flowing round him again. Then a little noise made him open his eyes and the room returned, as bright as a new toy and as hard and clear-cut as a knife, and with it Helen, now without her hat and coat. He was struggling to his feet, but she smilingly waved him back. In this new hard light, she looked different, fascinatingly so because, in spite of the subtle changes, she was still the same lovely Helen. But she, too, was obviously tired. She seemed rather smaller, more fragile now; there was something shadowy about her eyes. His heart went out to her. He ached to put his arm about the shoulders that now faintly drooped, or to fling himself down at her feet and lean his head against her arm as she rested in a chair. Already his tongue was shaping magic words.

"Hello, my dear! I thought I heard the car. Why this unexpected and dramatic return?" At the sound of this voice behind him, tired as he was, Adam leaped to his feet and turned to stare at a large sleepy man who had quietly entered the room

through a door at the other end. He was wearing a dressing-gown over his pyjamas and had obviously just risen from his bed, for his hair was all tousled and his face still clouded with sleep. It was a broad, humorous, clean-shaven face, full of wise little wrinkles, and that of a man of thirty-five or so.

"Hello!" said Helen, coolly. "Jim, this is Mr. Stewart, who's been staying with us at the Baddeley-Fragges'." The large man sleepily twinkled at Adam and held out a hand. "And Mr. Stewart and I," Helen went on, now more eagerly, "have had the most extraordinary adventures."

"Of course you have!" said her husband, leaning against the mantelshelf, stifling a yawn, then grinning at them. "I know, I know! You've had some unparalleled adventures. The fact is written all over you, my dear. But, before we go any further, may we expect a visit from the police before morning?"

"Now don't be absurd," Helen cried. "Though, as a matter of fact, that's the very point. We've escaped from the police."

"And you've thrown them off the scent," he pursued, with a vague irony and a glance of humorous comprehension that Adam somehow found very disturbing. "Good! In that case, I propose we all go to bed. I've been asleep once, and I'm really asleep now, only I'm not in bed. You're tired out, I can see, my dear; and Mr. Stewart here, if he will forgive my saying so, looks rather fagged. There's a room ready for him, and I can lend him anything he wants. To bed, to bed, without another word, and then we'll have all the adventures in the morning,

and I promise, if necessary, to have my mouth wide open and my eyes starting out of my head from breakfast to lunch time." And he beamed upon them.

Then Adam made up his mind. If he stayed, everything would be changed. He saw them all in the morning over the bacon and eggs, Helen and he by turns trotting out their fantastic little adventures under this large man's curiously disturbing eye; and he heard their voices telling one another that it had all been very amusing, that he must come again to King's End, that they must lunch with him in town. No, he must go, otherwise it would all be gone, the last silken thread that stretched back through the enchanted forest would be casually twitched out of his hand. He must go, and at once.

"I'm awfully sorry—very good of you," he stammered, "but—really—I can't stay—must get back to town." It was the lamest stuff, but it would serve if only he could hold on while the storm of protest broke over him.

They told him how monstrous his proposal was. There was no train within reach until morning. He could be in town before lunch even if he stayed the night. He was tired. All these things they pointed out to him, but he grimly held on. He noticed, too, after a minute of it, that it was really a kind of elaborate game they were all playing. All the time she was protesting and pretending incredulity, Helen was questioning him with large, serious eyes, and he was answering her, just as if they were talking again in the wood. She seemed to know what secret need was driving him out, to limp down the long road.

As he still held on, scarlet and stammering, to his fantastic decision, she mistily smiled at him, and her final glance, when the last protest had died, was like a rich warm cloak for his journey. But even her husband, who roared his amazement and disapproval, was only joining in the game, for under cover of his appearance of outraged common sense and baffled hospitality, he seemed to be watching Adam, almost brooding over him, with a queer sympathy flavoured a little with ironic humour. Had the man been suspicious or sullen or merely stupid, had he shown any signs of jealousy or mistrust or even silly complacency, Adam might have faced him, but these queerly comprehensive and faintly comic glances, so infinitely disturbing, only sharpened his desire to escape.

"Well, if you must go, you must," said Maythorn, smothering a yawn. "How are you going to manage it? That's the point to be settled now." He turned to Helen and added dubiously: "Of course, we could get the car out again."

"No, no!" Adam broke in, emphatically. "I shouldn't dream of allowing that. I can easily walk to the nearest station. As a matter of fact, I'd—er—rather like a walk." In the silence that followed you could almost hear that last brave silly little remark scampering away to oblivion.

"What time is it now?" asked Maythorn. "Half-past two. Well, let me see. By the way, though, you must at least have a drink before you go. Whisky-and-soda?" He filled and handed over a glass to Adam, watched him take his first long drink with an

affectionate solicitude that was almost paternal, then flicked his thumb through a time-table. "Yes, here we are. Now if you turn to the right outside the gate here, and walk forward about two miles, you'll come to the main road. Turn to the right again—you'll see the signpost—to a place called Ludworth, which is about four miles further on. There you can get a train about five o'clock that takes you to Muncaster, and connects there with the early morning express to London. I've caught it once or twice myself on very special and dreadful occasions. It's a breakfast train, and it lands you in town about ten o'clock."

"St. Pancras?" inquired Helen, with that little tilt of the head and delicately mischievous inflection of voice which Adam thought he would remember for ever. She glanced at him, and for one miraculous second it seemed to him as if everything were beginning all over again.

"King's Cross," replied her husband, "the terminus of the London and North Eastern Railway." There was a subtle suggestion of irony in the unusual precision with which he announced this fact. Then he turned to Adam again. "Well, if that's your programme, my dear chap—and I must say I don't envy you—then you ought to start fairly soon because you haven't too much time. I'm sorry we can't entertain you, but perhaps you'll stay some other time, and then we'll have the adventures out." He glanced smilingly at Helen, then bent upon Adam the last of those strangely disconcerting looks: this time it seemed to express a definitely half-comic sense of secret fellowship. "Helen will set you on

your way. Good-bye." He shook hands and lounged out, but appeared to leave behind him a wise ghost that kept them silent.

They went out into the hall, where they remained while Helen threw a dark cloak over her shoulders, hiding for ever that bravery of white arms and crimson silk he knew so well. Still without a word, he held open the outer door for her, and she stood on the threshold for a moment poised between light and darkness. Then she stepped out into the night and he followed her. As he quietly closed the door behind him, the thought came to him that this, too, was an escape, the last and strangest of all the fantastic escapes of the week, for now he could not clearly see what this durance was that threatened him, nor what freedom there was to beckon him out, and the whole thing was like some undertaking in a dream, where there are no reasons but only a harrying sense of urgency.

The waning night had no moon now but only a faint, blurred sheen of stars, and it was chill and heavy with dew, and the whole hour dark and tearful, and yet it seemed to Adam full of a mournful kindness after the brilliant, staring little place he had just left. Now he was walking behind Helen, down a narrow path across a place of fragrance and drenched shadows that was the garden. Thick bushes and low overhanging trees suddenly and blackly massed themselves in front of them until it seemed impossible that the path should go any futher. Before this deeper darkness, Helen halted, turned to whisper "Follow me," and stretched out a hand

ADAM IN MOONSHINE

behind her for him to grasp. Bending their heads a little, they plunged into the mouth of this little black cave of leaf and shadow, and threaded their way through it hand-in-hand, finding themselves at last overlooking the road. There was a tiny gate in the wall there, and Adam opened it and descended the two steps that dropped down into the grey dust of the highway. Helen stood leaning against the gate. He looked up at her, seeing more than his eyes could ever have gathered in that dim light. Now he wanted to say a million things to her, so he would say nothing.

He gently disengaged the hand that rested on the top of the gate, and raised it to his lips. He felt it pass caressingly across his face. "Good-bye, Helen." It came in a whisper.

The hand was gone, and now there fell from the swimming shadow above him a tinier whisper still. "Good-bye, Adam."

With sudden violence, cracking the world in two, he swung away and hurried over a dozen yards or so of the road. Then he stopped and looked back, but there was no last glimmer of face or waving hand among those unbroken shadows. She had gone, and there was nothing before him but miles of empty road and the greying desolation of the sky. He ached now to run back and call her name, but he turned away again and walked on. He walked slowly, for he was at the head of a vast procession and innumerable jostling and jangling troupes of memories, and he walked heavily, if only because he was carrying on his back, away into safety, a

THE LAST ESCAPE

whole new magical world. Mile after mile, he limped on through the quiet dust, under freshening skies, moving in a mammoth dream that only ended at last in sleep, the sleep that fell upon him in the waiting-room of Ludworth station, where he was told that the five o'clock train had come and gone.



RED
and
THE OUTSTATION
from
THE TREMBLING OF A LEAF
and
THE CASUARINA TREE
by
W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

Red

THE skipper thrust his hand into one of his trouser pockets and with difficulty, for they were not at the sides but in front and he was a portly man, pulled out a large silver watch. He looked at it and then looked again at the declining sun. The Kanaka at the wheel gave him a glance, but did not speak. The skipper's eyes rested on the island they were approaching. A white line of foam marked the reef. He knew there was an opening large enough to get his ship through, and when they came a little nearer he counted on seeing it. They had nearly an hour of daylight still before them. In the lagoon the water was deep and they could anchor comfortably. The chief of the village which he could already see among the coconut trees was a friend of the mate's, and it would be pleasant to go ashore for the night. The mate came forward at that minute and the skipper turned to him.

"We'll take a bottle of booze along with us and get some girls in to dance," he said.

"I don't see the opening," said the mate.

He was a Kanaka, a handsome, swarthy fellow, with somewhat the look of a later Roman emperor,

inclined to stoutness; but his face was fine and clean-cut.

"I'm dead sure there's one right here," said the captain, looking through his glasses. "I can't understand why I can't pick it up. Send one of the boys up the mast to have a look."

The mate called one of the crew and gave him the order. The captain watched the Kanaka climb and waited for him to speak. But the Kanaka shouted down that he could see nothing but the unbroken line of foam. The captain spoke Samoan like a native, and he cursed him freely.

"Shall he stay up there?" asked the mate.

"What the hell good does that do?" answered the captain. "The blame fool can't see worth a cent. You bet your sweet life I'd find the opening if I was up there."

He looked at the slender mast with anger. It was all very well for a native who had been used to climbing up coconut trees all his life. He was fat and heavy.

"Come down," he shouted. "You're no more use than a dead dog. We'll just have to go along the reef till we find the opening."

It was a seventy-ton schooner with paraffin auxiliary, and it ran, when there was no head wind, between four and five knots an hour. It was a bedraggled object; it had been painted white a very long time ago, but it was now dirty, dingy, and mottled. It smelt strongly of paraffin and of the copra which was its usual cargo. They were within a hundred feet of the reef now and the captain

told the steersman to run along it till they came to the opening. But when they had gone a couple of miles he realised that they had missed it. He went about and slowly worked back again. The white foam of the reef continued without interruption and now the sun was setting. With a curse at the stupidity of the crew the skipper resigned himself to waiting till next morning.

"Put her about," he said. "I can't anchor here."

They went out to sea a little and presently it was quite dark. They anchored. When the sail was furled the ship began to roll a good deal. They said in Apia that one day she would roll right over; and the owner, a German-American who managed one of the largest stores, said that no money was big enough to induce him to go out in her. The cook, a Chinese in white trousers, very dirty and ragged, and a thin white tunic, came to say that supper was ready, and when the skipper went into the cabin he found the engineer already seated at table. The engineer was a long, lean man with a scraggy neck. He was dressed in blue overalls and a sleeveless jersey which showed his thin arms tattooed from elbow to wrist.

"Hell, having to spend the night outside," said the skipper.

The engineer did not answer, and they ate their supper in silence. The cabin was lit by a dim oil lamp. When they had eaten the canned apricots with which the meal finished the Chink brought them a cup of tea. The skipper lit a cigar and went on the upper deck. The island now was only a darker

mass against the night. The stars were very bright. The only sound was the ceaseless breaking of the surf. The skipper sank into a deck-chair and smoked idly. Presently three or four members of the crew came up and sat down. One of them had a banjo and another a concertina. They began to play, and one of them sang. The native song sounded strange on these instruments. Then to the singing a couple began to dance. It was a barbaric dance, savage and primeval, rapid, with quick movements of the hands and feet and contortions of the body; it was sensual, sexual even, but sexual without passion. It was very animal, direct, weird without mystery, natural in short, and one might almost say childlike. At last they grew tired. They stretched themselves on the deck and slept, and all was silent. The skipper lifted himself heavily out of his chair and clambered down the companion. He went into his cabin and got out of his clothes. He climbed into his bunk and lay there. He panted a little in the heat of the night.

But next morning, when the dawn crept over the tranquil sea, the opening in the reef which had eluded them the night before was seen a little to the east of where they lay. The schooner entered the lagoon. There was not a ripple on the surface of the water. Deep down among the coral rocks you saw little coloured fish swim. When he had anchored his ship the skipper ate his breakfast and went on deck. The sun shone from an unclouded sky, but in the early morning the air was grateful and cool. It was Sunday, and there was a feeling

of quietness, a silence as though nature were at rest, which gave him a peculiar sense of comfort. He sat, looking at the wooded coast, and felt lazy and well at ease. Presently a slow smile moved his lips and he threw the stump of his cigar into the water.

"I guess I'll go ashore," he said. "Get the boat out."

He climbed stiffly down the ladder and was rowed to a little cove. The coconut trees came down to the water's edge, not in rows, but spaced out with an ordered formality. They were like a ballet of spinsters, elderly but flippant, standing in affected attitudes with the simpering graces of a bygone age. He sauntered idly through them, along a path that could be just seen winding its tortuous way, and it led him presently to a broad creek. There was a bridge across it, but a bridge constructed of single trunks of coconut trees, a dozen of them, placed end to end and supported where they met by a forked branch driven into the bed of the creek. You walked on a smooth, round surface, narrow and slippery, and there was no support for the hand. To cross such a bridge required sure feet and a stout heart. The skipper hesitated. But he saw on the other side, nestling among the trees, a white man's house; he made up his mind and, rather gingerly, began to walk. He watched his feet carefully, and where one trunk joined on to the next and there was a difference of level, he tottered a little. It was with a gasp of relief that he reached the last tree and finally

set his feet on the firm ground of the other side. He had been so intent on the difficult crossing that he never noticed anyone was watching him, and it was with surprise that he heard himself spoken to.

"It takes a bit of nerve to cross these bridges when you're not used to them."

He looked up and saw a man standing in front of him. He had evidently come out of the house which he had seen.

"I saw you hesitate," the man continued, with a smile on his lips, "and I was watching to see you fall in."

"Not on your life," said the captain, who had now recovered his confidence.

"I've fallen in myself before now. I remember, one evening I came back from shooting, and I fell in, gun and all. Now I get a boy to carry my gun for me."

He was a man no longer young, with a small beard, now somewhat grey, and a thin face. He was dressed in a singlet, without arms, and a pair of duck trousers. He wore neither shoes nor socks. He spoke English with a slight accent.

"Are you Neilson?" asked the skipper.

"I am."

"I've heard about you. I thought you lived somewhere round here."

The skipper followed his host into the little bungalow and sat down heavily in the chair which the other motioned him to take. While Neilson went out to fetch whisky and glasses he took a look round the room. It filled him with amazement.

He had never seen so many books. The shelves reached from floor to ceiling on all four walls, and they were closely packed. There was a grand piano littered with music, and a large table on which books and magazines lay in disorder. The room made him feel embarrassed. He remembered that Neilson was a queer fellow. No one knew very much about him, although he had been in the islands for so many years, but those who knew him agreed that he was queer. He was a Swede.

"You've got one big heap of books here," he said, when Neilson returned.

"They do no harm," answered Neilson with a smile.

"Have you read them all?" asked the skipper.

"Most of them."

"I'm a bit of a reader myself. I have the *Saturday Evening Post* sent me reglar."

Neilson poured his visitor a good stiff glass of whisky and gave him a cigar. The skipper volunteered a little information.

"I got in last night, but I couldn't find the opening, so I had to anchor outside. I never been this run before, but my people had some stuff they wanted to bring over here. Gray, d'you know him?"

"Yes, he's got a store a little way along."

"Well, there was a lot of canned stuff that he wanted over, an' he's got some copra. They thought I might just as well come over as lie idle at Apia. I run between Apia and Pago-Pago mostly, but they've got smallpox there just now, and there's nothing stirring."

He took a drink of his whisky and lit a cigar. He was a taciturn man, but there was something in Neilson that made him nervous, and his nervousness made him talk. The Swede was looking at him with large dark eyes in which there was an expression of faint amusement.

"This is a tidy little place you've got here."

"I've done my best with it."

"You must do pretty well with your trees. They look fine. With copra at the price it is now. I had a bit of a plantation myself once, in Upolu it was, but I had to sell it."

He looked round the room again, where all those books gave him a feeling of something incomprehensible and hostile.

"I guess you must find it a bit lonesome here though," he said.

"I've got used to it. I've been here for twenty-five years."

Now the captain could think of nothing more to say, and he smoked in silence. Neilson had apparently no wish to break it. He looked at his guest with a meditative eye. He was a tall man, more than six feet high, and very stout. His face was red and blotchy, with a network of little purple veins on the cheeks, and his features were sunk into its fatness. His eyes were bloodshot. His neck was buried in rolls of fat. But for a fringe of long curly hair, nearly white, at the back of his head, he was quite bald; and that immense, shiny surface of forehead, which might have given him a false look of intelligence, on the contrary gave

him one of peculiar imbecility. He wore a blue flannel shirt, open at the neck and showing his fat chest covered with a mat of reddish hair, and a very old pair of blue serge trousers. He sat in his chair in a heavy ungainly attitude, his great belly thrust forward and his fat legs uncrossed. All elasticity had gone from his limbs. Neilson wondered idly what sort of man he had been in his youth. It was almost impossible to imagine that this creature of vast bulk had ever been a boy who ran about. The skipper finished his whisky, and Neilson pushed the bottle towards him.

"Help yourself."

The skipper leaned forward and with his great hand seized it.

"And how come you in these parts anyways?" he said.

"Oh, I came out to the islands for my health. My lungs were bad and they said I hadn't a year to live. You see they were wrong."

"I meant, how come you to settle down right here?"

"I am a sentimentalist."

"Oh!"

Neilson knew that the skipper had not an idea what he meant, and he looked at him with an ironical twinkle in his dark eyes. Perhaps just because the skipper was so gross and dull a man the whim seized him to talk further.

"You were too busy keeping your balance to notice, when you crossed the bridge, but this spot is generally considered rather pretty."

"It's a cute little house you've got here."

"Ah, that wasn't here when I first came. There was a native hut, with its beehive roof and its pillars, overshadowed by a great tree with red flowers; and the croton bushes, their leaves yellow and red and golden, made a pied fence around it. And then all about were the coconut trees, as fanciful as women, and as vain. They stood at the water's edge and spent all day looking at their reflections. I was a young man then—Good Heavens, it's a quarter of a century ago—and I wanted to enjoy all the loveliness of the world in the short time allotted to me before I passed into the darkness. I thought it was the most beautiful spot I had ever seen. The first time I saw it I had a catch at my heart, and I was afraid I was going to cry. I wasn't more than twenty-five, and though I put the best face I could on it, I didn't want to die. And somehow it seemed to me that the very beauty of this place made it easier for me to accept my fate. I felt when I came here that all my past life had fallen away, Stockholm and its University, and then Bonn: it all seemed the life of somebody else, as though now at last I had achieved the reality which our doctors of philosophy—I am one myself, you know—had discussed so much. 'A year,' I cried to myself. 'I have a year. I will spend it here and then I am content to die.'

"We are foolish and sentimental and melodramatic at twenty-five, but if we weren't perhaps we should be less wise at fifty."

"Now drink, my friend. Don't let the nonsense I talk interfere with you."

He waved his thin hand towards the bottle, and the skipper finished what remained in his glass.

"You ain't drinking nothin'," he said, reaching for the whisky.

"I am of a sober habit," smiled the Swede. "I intoxicate myself in ways which I fancy are more subtle. But perhaps that is only vanity. Anyhow, the effects are more lasting and the results less deleterious."

"They say there's a deal of cocaine taken in the States now," said the captain.

Neilson chuckled.

"But I do not see a white man often," he continued, "and for once I don't think a drop of whisky can do me any harm."

He poured himself out a little, added some soda, and took a sip.

"And presently I found out why the spot had such an unearthly loveliness. Here love had tarried for a moment like a migrant bird that happens on a ship in mid-ocean and for a little while folds its tired wings. The fragrance of a beautiful passion hovered over it like the fragrance of hawthorn in May in the meadows of my home. It seems to me that the places where men have loved or suffered keep about them always some faint aroma of something that has not wholly died. It is as though they had acquired a spiritual significance which mysteriously affects those who pass. I wish I could make myself clear." He smiled a little.

"Though I cannot imagine that if I did you would understand."

He paused.

"I think this place was beautiful because here I had been loved beautifully." And now he shrugged his shoulders. "But perhaps it is only that my æsthetic sense is gratified by the happy conjunction of young love and a suitable setting."

Even a man less thick-witted than the skipper might have been forgiven if he were bewildered by Neilson's words. For he seemed faintly to laugh at what he said. It was as though he spoke from emotion which his intellect found ridiculous. He had said himself that he was a sentimentalist, and when sentimentality is joined with scepticism there is often the devil to pay.

He was silent for an instant and looked at the captain with eyes in which there was a sudden perplexity.

"You know, I can't help thinking that I've seen you before somewhere or other," he said.

"I couldn't say as I remember you," returned the skipper.

"I have a curious feeling as though your face were familiar to me. It's been puzzling me for some time. But I can't situate my recollection in any place or at any time."

The skipper massively shrugged his heavy shoulders.

"It's thirty years since I first come to the islands. A man can't figure on remembering all the folk he meets in a while like that."

The Swede shook his head.

"You know how one sometimes has the feeling that a place one has never been to before is strangely familiar. That's how I seem to see you." He gave a whimsical smile. "Perhaps I knew you in some past existence. Perhaps, perhaps you were the master of a galley in ancient Rome and I was a slave at the oar. Thirty years have you been here?"

"Every bit of thirty years."

"I wonder if you knew a man called Red?"

"Red?"

"That is the only name I've ever known him by. I never knew him personally. I never even set eyes on him. And yet I seem to see him more clearly than many men, my brothers, for instance, with whom I passed my daily life for many years. He lives in my imagination with the distinctness of a Paolo Malatesta or a Romeo. But I daresay you have never read Dante or Shakespeare?"

"I can't say as I have," said the captain.

Neilson, smoking a cigar, leaned back in his chair and looked vacantly at the ring of smoke which floated in the still air. A smile played on his lips, but his eyes were grave. Then he looked at the captain. There was in his gross obesity something extraordinarily repellent. He had the plethoric self-satisfaction of the very fat. It was an outrage. It set Neilson's nerves on edge. But the contrast between the man before him and the man he had in mind was pleasant.

"It appears that Red was the most comely thing you ever saw. I've talked to quite a number of

people who knew him in those days, white men, and they all agree that the first time you saw him his beauty just took your breath away. They called him Red on account of his flaming hair. It had a natural wave and he wore it long. It must have been of that wonderful colour that the pre-Raphaelites raved over. I don't think he was vain of it, he was much too ingenuous for that, but no one could have blamed him if he had been. He was tall, six feet and an inch or two—in the native house that used to stand here was the mark of his height cut with a knife on the central trunk that supported the roof—and he was made like a Greek god, broad in the shoulders and thin in the flanks; he was like Apollo, with just that soft roundness which Praxiteles gave him, and that suave, feminine grace which has in it something troubling and mysterious. His skin was dazzling white, milky, like satin; his skin was like a woman's."

"I had kind of a white skin myself when I was a kiddie," said the skipper, with a twinkle in his bloodshot eyes.

But Neilson paid no attention to him. He was telling his story now and interruption made him impatient.

"And his face was just as beautiful as his body. He had large blue eyes, very dark, so that some say they were black, and unlike most red-haired people he had dark eyebrows and long dark lashes. His features were perfectly regular and his mouth was like a scarlet wound. He was twenty."

On these words the Swede stopped with a certain

sense of the dramatic. He took a sip of whisky.

"He was unique. There never was anyone more beautiful. There was no more reason for him than for a wonderful blossom to flower on a wild plant. He was a happy accident of nature.

"One day he landed at that cove into which you must have put this morning. He was an American sailor, and he had deserted from a man-of-war in Apia. He had induced some good-humoured native to give him a passage on a cutter that happened to be sailing from Apia to Safoto, and he had been put ashore here in a dugout. I do not know why he deserted. Perhaps life on a man-of-war with its restrictions irked him, perhaps he was in trouble, and perhaps it was the South Seas and these romantic islands that got into his bones. Every now and then they take a man strangely, and he finds himself like a fly in a spider's web. It may be that there was a softness of fibre in him, and these green hills with their soft airs, this blue sea, took the northern strength from him as Delilah took the Nazarite's. Anyhow, he wanted to hide himself, and he thought he would be safe in this secluded nook till his ship had sailed from Samoa.

"There was a native hut at the cove and as he stood there, wondering where exactly he should turn his steps, a young girl came out and invited him to enter. He knew scarcely two words of the native tongue and she as little English. But he understood well enough what her smiles meant, and her pretty gestures, and he followed her. He sat down on a mat and she gave him slices of pineapple to

eat. I can speak of Red only from hearsay, but I saw the girl three years after he first met her, and she was scarcely nineteen then. You cannot imagine how exquisite she was. She had the passionate grace of the hibiscus and the rich colour. She was rather tall, slim, with the delicate features of her race, and large eyes like pools of still water under the palm trees; her hair, black and curling, fell down her back, and she wore a wreath of scented flowers. Her hands were lovely. They were so small, so exquisitely formed, they gave your heart-strings a wrench. And in those days she laughed easily. Her smile was so delightful that it made your knees shake. Her skin was like a field of ripe corn on a summer day. Good Heavens, how can I describe her? She was too beautiful to be real.

“And these two young things, she was sixteen and he was twenty, fell in love with one another at first sight. That is the real love, not the love that comes from sympathy, common interests, or intellectual community, but love pure and simple. That is the love that Adam felt for Eve when he awoke and found her in the garden gazing at him with dewy eyes. That is the love that draws the beasts to one another, and the Gods. That is the love that makes the world a miracle. That is the love which gives life its pregnant meaning. You have never heard of the wise, cynical French duke who said that with two lovers there is always one who loves and one who lets himself be loved; it is a bitter truth to which most of us have to resign ourselves; but now and then there are two who love and two

who let themselves be loved. Then one might fancy that the sun stands still as it stood when Joshua prayed to the God of Israel.

"And even now after all these years, when I think of these two, so young, so fair, so simple, and of their love, I feel a pang. It tears my heart just as my heart is torn when on certain nights I watch the full moon shining on the lagoon from an unclouded sky. There is always pain in the contemplation of perfect beauty.

"They were children. She was good and sweet and kind. I know nothing of him, and I like to think that then at all events he was ingenuous and frank. I like to think that his soul was as comely as his body. But I daresay he had no more soul than the creatures of the woods and forests who made pipes from reeds and bathed in the mountain streams when the world was young, and you might catch sight of little fawns galloping through the glade on the back of a bearded centaur. A soul is a troublesome possession and when man developed it he lost the Garden of Eden.

"Well, when Red came to the island it had recently been visited by one of those epidemics which the white man has brought to the South Seas, and one third of the inhabitants had died. It seems that the girl had lost all her near kin and she lived now in the house of distant cousins. The household consisted of two ancient crones, bowed and wrinkled, two younger women, and a man and a boy. For a few days he stayed there. But perhaps he felt himself too near the shore, with the possibility that

he might fall in with white men who would reveal his hiding-place; perhaps the lovers could not bear that the company of others should rob them for an instant of the delight of being together. One morning they set out, the pair of them, with the few things that belonged to the girl, and walked along a grassy path under the coconuts, till they came to the creek you see. They had to cross the bridge you crossed, and the girl laughed gleefully because he was afraid. She held his hand till they came to the end of the first tree, and then his courage failed him and he had to go back. He was obliged to take off all his clothes before he could risk it, and she carried them over for him on her head. They settled down in the empty hut that stood here. Whether she had any rights over it (land tenure is a complicated business in the islands), or whether the owner had died during the epidemic, I do not know, but anyhow no one questioned them, and they took possession. Their furniture consisted of a couple of grass-mats on which they slept, a fragment of looking-glass, and a bowl or two. In this pleasant land that is enough to start housekeeping on.

"They say that happy people have no history, and certainly a happy love has none. They did nothing all day long and yet the days seemed all too short. The girl had a native name, but Red called her Sally. He picked up the easy language very quickly, and he used to lie on the mat for hours while she chattered gaily to him. He was a silent fellow, and perhaps his mind was lethargic. He smoked incessantly the cigarettes which she made him out

of the native tobacco and pandanus leaf, and he watched her while with deft fingers she made grass mats. Often natives would come in and tell long stories of the old days when the island was disturbed by tribal wars. Sometimes he would go fishing on the reef, and bring home a basket full of coloured fish. Sometimes at night he would go out with a lantern to catch lobster. There were plantains round the hut and Sally would roast them for their frugal meal. She knew how to make delicious messes from coconuts, and the breadfruit tree by the side of the creek gave them its fruit. On feast-days they killed a little pig and cooked it on hot stones. They bathed together in the creek; and in the evening they went down to the lagoon and paddled about in a dugout, with its great outrigger. The sea was deep blue, wine-coloured at sundown, like the sea of Homeric Greece; but in the lagoon the colour had an infinite variety, aquamarine and amethyst and emerald; and the setting sun turned it for a short moment to liquid gold. Then there was the colour of the coral, brown, white, pink, red, purple; and the shapes it took were marvellous. It was like a magic garden, and the hurrying fish were like butterflies. It strangely lacked reality. Among the coral were pools with a floor of white sand and here, where the water was dazzling clear, it was very good to bathe. Then, cool and happy, they wandered back in the gloaming over the soft grass road to the creek, walking hand in hand, and now the mynah birds filled the coconut trees with their clamour. And then the night, with that

great sky shining with gold, that seemed to stretch more widely than the skies of Europe, and the soft airs that blew gently through the open hut, the long night again was all too short. She was sixteen and he was barely twenty. The dawn crept in among the wooden pillars of the hut and looked at those lovely children sleeping in one another's arms. The sun hid behind the great tattered leaves of the plantains so that it might not disturb them, and then, with playful malice, shot a golden ray, like the outstretched paw of a Persian cat, on their faces. They opened their sleepy eyes and they smiled to welcome another day. The weeks lengthened into months, and a year passed. They seemed to love one another as—I hesitate to say passionately, for passion has in it always a shade of sadness, a touch of bitterness or anguish, but as whole heartedly, as simply and naturally as on that first day on which, meeting, they had recognised that a god was in them.

"If you had asked them I have no doubt that they would have thought it impossible to suppose their love could ever cease. Do we not know that the essential element of love is a belief in its own eternity? And yet perhaps in Red there was already a very little seed, unknown to himself and unsuspected by the girl, which would in time have grown to weariness. For one day one of the natives from the cove told them that some way down the coast at the anchorage was a British whaling-ship.

" 'Gee,' he said, 'I wonder if I could make a trade of some nuts and plantains for a pound or two of tobacco.'

"The pandanus cigarettes that Sally made him with untiring hands were strong and pleasant enough to smoke, but they left him unsatisfied; and he yearned on a sudden for real tobacco, hard, rank, and pungent. He had not smoked a pipe for many months. His mouth watered at the thought of it. One would have thought some premonition of harm would have made Sally seek to dissuade him, but love possessed her so completely that it never occurred to her any power on earth could take him from her. They went up into the hills together and gathered a great basket of wild oranges, green, but sweet and juicy; and they picked plantains from around the hut, and coconuts from their trees, and breadfruit and mangoes; and they carried them down to the cove. They loaded the unstable canoe with them, and Red and the native boy who had brought them the news of the ship paddled along outside the reef.

"It was the last time she ever saw him.

"Next day the boy came back alone. He was all in tears. This is the story he told. When after their long paddle they reached the ship and Red hailed it, a white man looked over the side and told them to come on board. They took the fruit they had brought with them and Red piled it up on the deck. The white man and he began to talk, and they seemed to come to some agreement. One of them went below and brought up tobacco. Red took some at once and lit a pipe. The boy imitated h he blew a great cloud of smoke
Then they said something to him

and he went into the cabin. Through the open door the boy, watching curiously, saw a bottle brought out and glasses. Red drank and smoked. They seemed to ask him something, for he shook his head and laughed. The man, the first man who had spoken to them, laughed too, and he filled Red's glass once more. They went on talking and drinking, and presently, growing tired of watching a sight that meant nothing to him, the boy curled himself up on the deck and slept. He was awakened by a kick; and, jumping to his feet, he saw that the ship was slowly sailing out of the lagoon. He caught sight of Red seated at the table, with his head resting heavily on his arms, fast asleep. He made a movement towards him, intending to wake him, but a rough hand seized his arm, and a man, with a scowl and words which he did not understand, pointed to the side. He shouted to Red, but in a moment he was seized and flung overboard. Helpless, he swam round to his canoe which was drifting a little way off, and pushed it on to the reef. He climbed in and, sobbing all the way, paddled back to shore.

"What had happened was obvious enough. The whaler, by desertion or sickness, was short of hands, and the captain when Red came aboard had asked him to sign on; on his refusal he had made him drunk and kidnapped him.

"Sally was beside herself with grief. For three days she screamed and cried. The natives did what they could to comfort her, but she would not be comforted. She would not eat. And then, ex-

hausted, she sank into a sullen apathy. She spent long days at the cove, watching the lagoon, in the vain hope that Red somehow or other would manage to escape. She sat on the white sand, hour after hour, with the tears running down her cheeks, and at night dragged herself wearily back across the creek to the little hut where she had been happy. The people with whom she had lived before Red came to the island wished her to return to them, but she would not; she was convinced that Red would come back, and she wanted him to find her where he had left her. Four months later she was delivered of a still-born child, and the old woman who had come to help her through her confinement remained with her in the hut. All joy was taken from her life. If her anguish with time became less intolerable it was replaced by a settled melancholy. You would not have thought that among these people, whose emotions, though so violent, are very transient, a woman could be found capable of so enduring a passion. She never lost the profound conviction that sooner or later Red would come back. She watched for him, and every time someone crossed this slender little bridge of coconut trees she looked. It might at last be he."

Neilson stopped talking and gave a faint sigh.

"And what happened to her in the end?" asked the skipper.

Neilson smiled bitterly.

"Oh, three years afterwards she took up with another white man."

The skipper gave a fat, cynical chuckle.

"That's generally what happens to them," he said.

The Swede shot him a look of hatred. He did not know why that gross, obese man excited in him so violent a repulsion. But his thoughts wandered and he found his mind filled with memories of the past. He went back five and twenty years. It was when he first came to the island, weary of Apia, with its heavy drinking, its gambling and coarse sensuality, a sick man, trying to resign himself to the loss of the career which had fired his imagination with ambitious thoughts. He set behind him resolutely all his hopes of making a great name for himself and strove to content himself with the few poor months of careful life which was all that he could count on. He was boarding with a half-caste trader who had a store a couple of miles along the coast at the edge of a native village; and one day, wandering aimlessly along the grassy paths of the coconut groves, he had come upon the hut in which Sally lived. The beauty of the spot had filled him with a rapture so great that it was almost painful, and then he had seen Sally. She was the loveliest creature he had ever seen, and the sadness in those dark, magnificent eyes of hers affected him strangely. The Kanakas were a handsome race, and beauty was not rare among them, but it was the beauty of shapely animals. It was empty. But those tragic eyes were dark with mystery, and you felt in them the bitter complexity of the groping, human soul. The trader told him the story and it moved him.

"Do you think he'll ever come back?" asked Neilson.

"No fear. Why, it'll be a couple of years before the ship is paid off, and by then he'll have forgotten all about her. I bet he was pretty mad when he woke up and found he'd been shanghaied, and I shouldn't wonder but he wanted to fight somebody. But he'd got to grin and bear it, and I guess in a month he was thinking it the best thing that had ever happened to him that he got away from the island."

But Neilson could not get the story out of his head. Perhaps because he was sick and weakly, the radiant health of Red appealed to his imagination. Himself an ugly man, insignificant of appearance, he prized very highly comeliness in others. He had never been passionately in love, and certainly he had never been passionately loved. The mutual attraction of those two young things gave him a singular delight. It had the ineffable beauty of the Absolute. He went again to the little hut by the creek. He had a gift for languages and an energetic mind, accustomed to work, and he had already given much time to the study of the local tongue. Old habit was strong in him and he was gathering together material for a paper on the Samoan speech. The old crone who shared the hut with Sally invited him to come in and sit down. She gave him *kava* to drink and cigarettes to smoke. She was glad to have someone to chat with and while she talked he looked at Sally. She reminded him of the Psyche in the museum at Naples. Her features had the

same clear purity of line, and though she had borne a child she had still a virginal aspect.

It was not till he had seen her two or three times that he induced her to speak. Then it was only to ask him if he had seen in Apia a man called Red. Two years had passed since his disappearance, but it was plain that she still thought of him incessantly.

It did not take Neilson long to discover that he was in love with her. It was only by an effort of will now that he prevented himself from going every day to the creek, and when he was not with Sally his thoughts were. At first, looking upon himself as a dying man, he asked only to look at her, and occasionally hear her speak, and his love gave him a wonderful happiness. He exulted in its purity. He wanted nothing from her but the opportunity to weave around her graceful person a web of beautiful fancies. But the open air, the equable temperature, the rest, the simple fare, began to have an unexpected effect on his health. His temperature did not soar at night to such alarming heights, he coughed less and began to put on weight; six months passed without his having a hæmorrhage; and on a sudden he saw the possibility that he might live. He had studied his disease carefully, and the hope dawned upon him that with great care he might arrest its course. It exhilarated him to look forward once more to the future. He made plans. It was evident that any active life was out of the question, but he could live on the islands, and the small income he had, insufficient elsewhere, would be ample to keep him. He could grow coconuts; that

would give him an occupation; and he would send for his books and a piano; but his quick mind saw that in all this he was merely trying to conceal from himself the desire which obsessed him.

He wanted Sally. He loved not only her beauty, but that dim soul which he divined behind her suffering eyes. He would intoxicate her with his passion. In the end he would make her forget. And in an ecstasy of surrender he fancied himself giving her too the happiness which he had thought never to know again, but had now so miraculously achieved.

He asked her to live with him. She refused. He had expected that and did not let it depress him, for he was sure that sooner or later she would yield. His love was irresistible. He told the old woman of his wishes, and found somewhat to his surprise that she and the neighbours, long aware of them, were strongly urging Sally to accept his offer. After all, every native was glad to keep house for a white man, and Neilson according to the standards of the island was a rich one. The trader with whom he boarded went to her and told her not to be a fool; such an opportunity would not come again, and after so long she could not still believe that Red would ever return. The girl's resistance only increased Neilson's desire, and what had been a very pure love now became an agonising passion. He was determined that nothing should stand in his way. He gave Sally no peace. At last, worn out by his persistence and the persuasions, by turns pleading and angry, of everyone around her, she consented. But the day after when, exultant, he went to see her he found

that in the night she had burnt down the hut in which she and Red had lived together. The old crone ran towards him full of angry abuse of Sally, but he waved her aside; it did not matter; they would build a bungalow on the place where the hut had stood. A European house would really be more convenient if he wanted to bring out a piano and a vast number of books.

And so the little wooden house was built in which he had now lived for many years, and Sally became his wife. But after the first few weeks of rapture, during which he was satisfied with what she gave him he had known little happiness. She had yielded to him, through weariness, but she had only yielded what she set no store on. The soul which he had dimly glimpsed escaped him. He knew that she cared nothing for him. She still loved Red, and all the time she was waiting for his return. At a sign from him, Neilson knew that, notwithstanding his love, his tenderness, his sympathy, his generosity, she would leave him without a moment's hesitation. She would never give a thought to his distress. Anguish seized him and he battered at that impenetrable self of hers which sullenly resisted him. His love became bitter. He tried to melt her heart with kindness, but it remained as hard as before; he feigned indifference, but she did not notice it. Sometimes he lost his temper and abused her, and then she wept silently. Sometimes he thought she was nothing but a fraud, and that soul simply an invention of his own, and that he could not get into the sanctuary of her heart because there was no

sanctuary there. His love became a prison from which he longed to escape, but he had not the strength merely to open the door—that was all it needed—and walk out into the open air. It was torture and at last he became numb and hopeless. In the end the fire burnt itself out and, when he saw her eyes rest for an instant on the slender bridge, it was no longer rage that filled his heart but impatience. For many years now they had lived together bound by the ties of habit and convenience, and it was with a smile that he looked back on his old passion. She was an old woman, for the women on the islands age quickly, and if he had no love for her any more he had tolerance. She left him alone. He was contented with his piano and his books.

His thoughts led him to a desire for words.

"When I look back now and reflect on that brief passionate love of Red and Sally, I think that perhaps they should thank the ruthless fate that separated them when their love seemed still to be at its height. They suffered, but they suffered in beauty. They were spared the real tragedy of love."

"I don't know exactly as I get you," said the skipper.

"The tragedy of love is not death or separation. How long do you think it would have been before one or other of them ceased to care? Oh, it is dreadfully bitter to look at a woman whom you have loved with all your heart and soul, so that you felt you could not bear to let her out of your sight, and realise that you would not mind if you never saw

her again. The tragedy of love is indifference."

But while he was speaking a very extraordinary thing happened. Though he had been addressing the skipper he had not been talking to him, he had been putting his thoughts into words for himself, and with his eyes fixed on the man in front of him he had not seen him. But now an image presented itself to them, an image not of the man he saw, but of another man. It was as though he were looking into one of those distorting mirrors that make you extraordinarily squat or outrageously elongate, but here exactly the opposite took place, and in the obese, ugly old man he caught the shadowy glimpse of a stripling. He gave him now a quick, searching scrutiny. Why had a haphazard stroll brought him just to this place? A sudden tremor of his heart made him slightly breathless. An absurd suspicion seized him. What had occurred to him was impossible, and yet it might be a fact.

"What is your name?" he asked abruptly.

The skipper's face puckered and he gave a cunning chuckle. He looked then malicious and horribly vulgar.

"It's such a damned long time since I heard it that I almost forget it myself. But for thirty years now in the islands they've always called me Red."

His huge form shook as he gave a low, almost silent laugh. It was obscene. Neilson shuddered. Red was hugely amused, and from his bloodshot eyes tears ran down his cheeks.

Neilson gave a gasp, for at that moment a woman came in. She was a native, a woman of somewhat

commanding presence, stout without being corpulent, dark, for the natives grow darker with age, with very grey hair. She wore a black Mother Hubbard, and its thinness showed her heavy breasts. The moment had come.

She made an observation to Neilson about some household matter and he answered. He wondered if his voice sounded as unnatural to her as it did to himself. She gave the man who was sitting in the chair by the window an indifferent glance, and went out of the room. The moment had come and gone.

Neilson for a moment could not speak. He was strangely shaken. Then he said:

"I'd be very glad if you'd stay and have a bit of dinner with me. Pot luck."

"I don't think I will," said Red. "I must go after this fellow Gray. I'll give him his stuff and then I'll get away. I want to be back in Apia tomorrow."

"I'll send a boy along with you to show you the way."

"That'll be fine."

Red heaved himself out of his chair, while the Swede called one of the boys who worked on the plantation. He told him where the skipper wanted to go, and the boy stepped along the bridge. Red prepared to follow him.

"Don't fall in," said Neilson.

"Not on your life."

Neilson watched him make his way across and when he had disappeared among the coconuts he

looked still. Then he sank heavily in his chair. Was that the man who had prevented him from being happy? Was that the man whom Sally had loved all these years and for whom she had waited so desperately? It was grotesque. A sudden fury seized him so that he had an instinct to spring up and smash everything around him. He had been cheated. They had seen each other at last and had not known it. He began to laugh, mirthlessly, and his laughter grew till it became hysterical. The Gods had played him a cruel trick. And he was old now.

At last Sally came in to tell him dinner was ready. He sat down in front of her and tried to eat. He wondered what she would say if he told her now that the fat old man sitting in the chair was the lover whom she remembered still with the passionate abandonment of her youth. Years ago, when he hated her because she made him so unhappy, he would have been glad to tell her. He wanted to hurt her then as she hurt him, because his hatred was only love. But now he did not care. He shrugged his shoulders listlessly.

"What did that man want?" she asked presently.

He did not answer at once. She was old too, a fat old native woman. He wondered why he had ever loved her so madly. He had laid at her feet all the treasures of his soul, and she had cared nothing for them. Waste, what waste! And now, when he looked at her, he felt only contempt. His patience was at last exhausted. He answered her question.

"He's the captain of a schooner. He's come from Apia."

"Yes."

"He brought me news from home. My eldest brother is very ill and I must go back."

"Will you be gone long?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

12-1-19

THE OUTSTATION

THE new assistant arrived in the afternoon. When the Resident, Mr. Warburton, was told that the prahu was in sight he put on his solar topee and went down to the landing-stage. The guard, eight little Dyak soldiers, stood to attention as he passed. He noted with satisfaction that their bearing was martial, their uniforms neat and clean, and their guns shining. They were a credit to him. From the landing-stage he watched the bend of the river round which in a moment the boat would sweep. He looked very smart in his spotless ducks and white shoes. He held under his arm a gold-headed Malacca cane which had been given him by the Sultan of Perak. He awaited the newcomer with mingled feelings. There was more work in the district than one man could properly do, and during his periodical tours of the country under his charge it had been inconvenient to leave the station in the hands of a native clerk, but he had been so long the only white man there that he could not face the arrival of another without misgiving. He was accustomed to loneliness. During the war he had not seen an English face for three years ;

and once when he was instructed to put up an afforestation officer he was seized with panic, so that when the stranger was due to arrive, having arranged everything for his reception, he wrote a note telling him he was obliged to go up river, and fled; he remained away till he was informed by a messenger that his guest had left.

Now the prahu appeared in the broad reach. It was manned by prisoners, Dyaks under various sentences, and a couple of warders were waiting on the landing-stage to take them back to jail. They were sturdy fellows, used to the river, and they rowed with a powerful stroke. As the boat reached the side a man got out from under the attap awning and stepped on shore. The guard presented arms.

"Here we are at last. By God, I'm as cramped as the devil. I've brought you your mail."

He spoke with exuberant joviality. Mr. Warburton politely held out his hand.

"Mr. Cooper, I presume?"

"That's right. Were you expecting anyone else?"

The question had a facetious intent, but the Resident did not smile.

"My name is Warburton. I'll show you your quarters. They'll bring your kit along."

He preceded Cooper along the narrow pathway

and they entered a compound in which stood a small bungalow.

"I've had it made as habitable as I could, but of course no one has lived in it for a good many years."

It was built on piles. It consisted of a long living-room which opened on to a broad verandah, and behind, on each side of a passage, were two bedrooms.

"This'll do me all right," said Cooper.

"I daresay you want to have a bath and a change. I shall be very much pleased if you'll dine with me to-night. Will eight o'clock suit you?"

"Any old time will do for me."

The Resident gave a polite, but slightly disconcerted smile, and withdrew. He returned to the Fort where his own residence was. The impression which Allen Cooper had given him was not very favourable, but he was a fair man, and he knew that it was unjust to form an opinion on so brief a glimpse. Cooper seemed to be about thirty. He was a tall, thin fellow, with a sallow face in which there was not a spot of colour. It was a face all in one tone. He had a large, hooked nose and blue eyes. When, entering the bungalow, he had taken off his topee and flung it to a waiting boy, Mr. Warburton noticed that his large skull, covered with short, brown hair, contrasted somewhat oddly

with a weak, small chin. He was dressed in khaki shorts and a khaki shirt, but they were shabby and soiled ; and his battered topee had not been cleaned for days. Mr. Warburton reflected that the young man had spent a week on a coasting steamer and had passed the last forty-eight hours lying in the bottom of a prahu.

“ We’ll see what he looks like when he comes in to dinner.”

He went into his room where his things were as neatly laid out as if he had an English valet, undressed, and, walking down the stairs to the bath-house, sluiced himself with cool water. The only concession he made to the climate was to wear a white dinner-jacket ; but otherwise, in a boiled shirt and a high collar, silk socks and patent-leather shoes, he dressed as formally as though he were dining at his club in Pall Mall. A careful host, he went into the dining-room to see that the table was properly laid. It was gay with orchids, and the silver shone brightly. The napkins were folded into elaborate shapes. Shaded candles in silver candlesticks shed a soft light. Mr. Warburton smiled his approval and returned to the sitting-room to await his guest. Presently he appeared. Cooper was wearing the khaki shorts, the khaki shirt, and the ragged jacket in which he had landed. Mr. Warburton’s smile or greeting froze on his face.

"Hulloa, you're all dressed up," said Cooper. "I didn't know you were going to do that. I very nearly put on a sarong."

"It doesn't matter at all. I daresay your boys were busy."

"You needn't have bothered to dress on my account, you know."

"I didn't. I always dress for dinner."

"Even when you're alone?"

"Especially when I'm alone," replied Mr. Warburton, with a frigid stare.

He saw a twinkle of amusement in Cooper's eyes, and he flushed an angry red. Mr. Warburton was a hot-tempered man; you might have guessed that from his red face with its pugnacious features and from his red hair now growing white; his blue eyes, cold as a rule and observing, could flash with sudden wrath; but he was a man of the world and he hoped a just one. He must do his best to get on with this fellow.

"When I lived in London I moved in circles in which it would have been just as eccentric not to dress for dinner every night as not to have a bath every morning. When I came to Borneo I saw no reason to discontinue so good a habit. For three years during the war I never saw a white man. I never omitted to dress on a single occasion on which I was well enough to come into dinner.

You have not been very long in this country; believe me, there is no better way to maintain the proper pride which you should have in yourself. When a white man surrenders in the slightest degree to the influences that surround him he very soon loses his self-respect, and when he loses his self-respect you may be quite sure that the natives will soon cease to respect him."

"Well, if you expect me to put on a boiled shirt and a stiff collar in this heat I'm afraid you'll be disappointed."

"When you are dining in your own bungalow you will, of course, dress as you think fit, but when you do me the pleasure of dining with me, perhaps you will come to the conclusion that it is only polite to wear the costume usual in civilised society."

Two Malay boys, in sarongs and songkoks, with smart white coats and brass buttons, came in one bearing gin pahits, and the other a tray on which were olives and anchovies. Then they went in to dinner. Mr. Warburton flattered himself that he had the best cook, a Chinese, in Borneo, and he took great trouble to have as good food as in the difficult circumstances was possible. He exercised much ingenuity in making the best of his materials.

"Would you care to look at the menu?" he said, handing it to Cooper.

It was written in French and the dishes had resounding names. They were waited on by the two boys. In opposite corners of the room two more waved immense fans, and so gave movement to the sultry air. The fare was sumptuous and the champagne excellent.

"Do you do yourself like this every day?" said Cooper.

Mr. Warburton gave the menu a careless glance.

"I have not noticed that the dinner is any different from usual," he said. "I eat very little myself, but I make a point of having a proper dinner served to me every night. It keeps the cook in practice and it's good discipline for the boys."

The conversation proceeded with effort. Mr. Warburton was elaborately courteous, and it may be that he found a slightly malicious amusement in the embarrassment which he thereby occasioned in his companion. Cooper had not been more than a few months in Sembulu, and Mr. Warburton's enquiries about friends of his in Kuala Solor were soon exhausted.

"By the way," he said presently, "did you meet a lad called Hennerley? He's come out recently, I believe."

"Oh yes, he's in the police. A rotten bounder."

"I should hardly have expected him to be that. His uncle is my friend Lord Barraclough. I had a

letter from Lady Barracrough only the other day asking me to look out for him."

"I heard he was related to somebody or other. I suppose that's how he got the job. He's been to Eton and Oxford and he doesn't forget to let you know it."

"You surprise me," said Mr. Warburton. "All his family have been at Eton and Oxford for a couple of hundred years. I should have expected him to take it as a matter of course."

"I thought him a damned prig."

"To what school did you go?"

"I was born in Barbadoes. I was educated there."

"Oh, I see."

Mr. Warburton managed to put so much offensiveness into his brief reply that Cooper flushed. For a moment he was silent.

"I've had two or three letters from Kuala Solor," continued Mr. Warburton, "and my impression was that young Hennerley was a great success. They say he's a first-rate sportsman."

"Oh, yes, he's very popular. He's just the sort of fellow they would like in K.S. I haven't got much use for the first-rate sportsman myself. What does it amount to in the long run that a man can play golf and tennis better than other people? And who cares if he can make a break of seventy-

five at billiards? They attach a damned sight too much importance to that sort of thing in England."

"Do you think so? I was under the impression that the first-rate sportsman had come out of the war certainly no worse than anyone else."

"Oh, if you're going to talk of the war then I do know what I'm talking about. I was in the same regiment as Hennerley and I can tell you that the men couldn't stick him at any price."

"How do you know?"

"Because I was one of the men."

"Oh, you hadn't got a commission."

"A fat chance I had of getting a commission. I was what was called a Colonial. I hadn't been to a public school and I had no influence. I was in the ranks the whole damned time."

Cooper frowned. He seemed to have difficulty in preventing himself from breaking out into violent invective. Mr. Warburton watched him, his little blue eyes narrowed, watched him and formed his opinion. Changing the conversation, he began to speak to Cooper about the work that would be required of him, and as the clock struck ten he rose.

"Well, I won't keep you any more. I daresay you're tired by your journey."

They shook hands.

"Oh, I say, look here," said Cooper, "I wonder

if you can find me a boy. The boy I had before never turned up when I was starting from K.S. He took my kit on board and all that, and then disappeared. I didn't know he wasn't there till we were out of the river."

"I'll ask my head-boy. I have no doubt he can find you someone."

"All right. Just tell him to send the boy along and if I like the look of him I'll take him."

There was a moon, so that no lantern was needed. Cooper walked across from the Fort to his bungalow.

"I wonder why on earth they've sent me a fellow like that?" reflected Mr. Warburton. "If that's the kind of man they're going to get out now I don't think much of it."

He strolled down his garden. The Fort was built on the top of a little hill and the garden ran down to the river's edge; on the bank was an harbour, and hither it was his habit to come after dinner to smoke a cheroot. And often from the river that flowed below him a voice was heard, the voice of some Malay too timorous to venture into the light of day, and a complaint or an accusation was softly wafted to his ears, a piece of information was whispered to him or a useful hint, which otherwise would never have come into his official ken. He threw himself heavily into a long

rattan chair. Cooper! An envious, ill-bred fellow, bumptious, self-assertive and vain. But Mr. Warburton's irritation could not withstand the silent beauty of the night. The air was scented with the sweet-smelling flowers of a tree that grew at the entrance to the harbour, and the fire-flies, sparkling dimly, flew with their slow and silvery flight. The moon made a pathway on the broad river for the light feet of Siva's bride, and on the further bank a row of palm trees was delicately silhouetted against the sky. Peace stole into the soul of Mr. Warburton.

He was a queer creature and he had had a singular career. At the age of twenty-one he had inherited a considerable fortune, a hundred thousand pounds, and when he left Oxford he threw himself into the gay life, which in those days (now Mr. Warburton was a man of four and fifty) offered itself to the young man of good family. He had his flat in Mount Street, his private hansom, and his hunting-box in Warwickshire. He went to all the places where the fashionable congregate. He was handsome, amusing, and generous. He was a figure in the society of London in the early nineties, and society then had not lost its exclusiveness nor its brilliance. The Boer War which shook it was unthought of; the Great War which destroyed it was prophesied only by the pessimists. It was

no unpleasant thing to be a rich young man in those days, and Mr. Warburton's chimney-piece during the season was packed with cards for one great function after another. Mr. Warburton displayed them with complacency. For Mr. Warburton was a snob. He was not a timid snob, a little ashamed of being impressed by his betters, nor a snob who sought the intimacy of persons who had acquired celebrity in politics or notoriety in the arts, nor the snob who was dazzled by riches; he was the naked, unadulterated common snob who dearly loved a lord. He was touchy and quick-tempered, but he would much rather have been snubbed by a person of quality than flattered by a commoner. His name figured insignificantly in Burke's Peerage, and it was marvellous to watch the ingenuity he used to mention his distant relationship to the noble family he belonged to; but never a word did he say of the honest Liverpool manufacturer from whom, through his mother, a Miss Gubbins, he had come by his fortune. It was the terror of his fashionable life that at Cowes, maybe, or at Ascot, when he was with a duchess or even with a prince of the blood, one of these relatives would claim acquaintance with him.

His failing was too obvious not soon to become notorious, but its extravagance saved it from being merely despicable. The great whom he

adored laughed at him, but in their hearts felt his adoration not unnatural. Poor Warburton was a dreadful snob, of course, but after all he was a good fellow. He was always ready to back a bill for an impecunious nobleman, and if you were in a tight corner you could safely count on him for a hundred pounds. He gave good dinners. He played whist badly, but never minded how much he lost if the company was select. He happened to be a gambler, an unlucky one, but he was a good loser, and it was impossible not to admire the coolness with which he lost five hundred pounds at a sitting. His passion for cards, almost as strong as his passion for titles, was the cause of his undoing. The life he led was expensive and his gambling losses were formidable. He began to plunge more heavily, first on horses, and then on the Stock Exchange. He had a certain simplicity of character, and the unscrupulous found him an ingenuous prey. I do not know if he ever realised that his smart friends laughed at him behind his back, but I think he had an obscure instinct that he could not afford to appear other than careless of his money. He got into the hands of money-lenders. At the age of thirty-four he was ruined.

He was too much imbued with the spirit of his class to hesitate in the choice of his next step. When a man in his set had run through his money, he went

out to the colonies. No one heard Mr. Warburton repine. He made no complaint because a noble friend had advised a disastrous speculation, he pressed nobody to whom he had lent money to repay it, he paid his debts (if he had only known it, the despised blood of the Liverpool manufacturer came out in him there), sought help from no one, and, never having done a stroke of work in his life, looked for a means of livelihood. He remained cheerful, unconcerned and full of humour. He had no wish to make anyone with whom he happened to be uncomfortable by the recital of his misfortune. Mr. Warburton was a snob, but he was also a gentleman.

The only favour he asked of any of the great friends in whose daily company he had lived for years was a recommendation. The able man who was at that time Sultan of Sembulu took him into his service. The night before he sailed he dined for the last time at his club

"I hear you're going away, Warburton," the old Duke of Hereford said to him.

"Yes, I'm going to Borneo."

"Good God, what are you going there for?"

"Oh, I'm broke."

"Are you? I'm sorry. Well, let us know when you come back. I hope you have a good time."

"Oh yes. Lots of shooting, you know."

The Duke nodded and passed on. A few hours later Mr. Warburton watched the coast of England recede into the mist, and he left behind everything which to him made life worth living.

Twenty years had passed since then. He kept up a busy correspondence with various great ladies and his letters were amusing and chatty. He never lost his love for titled persons and paid careful attention to the announcements in *The Times* (which reached him six weeks after publication) of their comings and goings. He perused the column which records births, deaths, and marriages, and he was always ready with his letter of congratulation or condolence. The illustrated papers told him how people looked and on his periodical visits to England, able to take up the threads as though they had never been broken, he knew all about any new person who might have appeared on the social surface. His interest in the world of fashion was as vivid as when himself had been a figure in it. It still seemed to him the only thing that mattered.

But insensibly another interest had entered into his life. The position he found himself in flattered his vanity ; he was no longer the sycophant craving the smiles of the great, he was the master whose word was law. He was gratified by the guard of

Dyak soldiers who presented arms as he passed. He liked to sit in judgement on his fellow men. It pleased him to compose quarrels between rival chiefs. When the head-hunters were troublesome in the old days he set out to chastise them with a thrill of pride in his own behaviour. He was too vain not to be of dauntless courage, and a pretty story was told of his coolness in adventuring single-handed into a stockaded village and demanding the surrender of a bloodthirsty pirate. He became a skilful administrator. He was strict, just and honest.

And little by little he conceived a deep love for the Malays. He interested himself in their habits and customs. He was never tired of listening to their talk. He admired their virtues, and with a smile and a shrug of the shoulders condoned their vices.

"In my day," he would say, "I have been on intimate terms with some of the greatest gentlemen in England, but I have never known finer gentlemen than some well-born Malays whom I am proud to call my friends."

He liked their courtesy and their distinguished manners, their gentleness and their sudden passions. He knew by instinct exactly how to treat them. He had a genuine tenderness for them. But he never forgot that he was an English gentleman, and he had no patience with the white men who

yielded to native customs. He made no surrenders. And he did not imitate so many of the white men in taking a native woman to wife, for an intrigue of this nature, however sanctified by custom, seemed to him not only shocking but undignified. A man who had been called George by Albert Edward, Prince of Wales could hardly be expected to have any connection with a native. And when he returned to Borneo from his visits to England it was now with something like relief. His friends, like himself, were no longer young, and there was a new generation which looked upon him as a tiresome old man. It seemed to him that the England of to-day had lost a good deal of what he had loved in the England of his youth. But Borneo remained the same. It was home to him now. He meant to remain in the service as long as was possible, and the hope in his heart was that he would die before at last he was forced to retire. He had stated in his will that wherever he died he wished his body to be brought back to Sembulu, and buried among the people he loved within the sound of the softly flowing river.

But these emotions he kept hidden from the eyes of men; and no one, seeing this spruce, stout, well-set up man, with his clean-shaven strong face and his whitening hair, would have dreamed that he cherished so profound a sentiment.

He knew how the work of the station should be done, and during the next few days he kept a suspicious eye on his assistant. He saw very soon that he was painstaking and competent. The only fault he had to find with him was that he was brusque with the natives.

"The Malays are shy and very sensitive," he said to him. "I think you will find that you will get much better results if you take care always to be polite, patient and kindly."

Cooper gave a short, grating laugh.

"I was born in Barbadoes and I was in Africa in the war. I don't think there's much about niggers that I don't know."

"I know nothing," said Mr. Warburton acidly. "But we were not talking of them. We were talking of Malays."

"Aren't they niggers?"

"You are very ignorant," replied Mr. Warburton.

He said no more.

On the first Sunday after Cooper's arrival he asked him to dinner. He did everything ceremoniously, and though they had met on the previous day in the office and later, on the Fort verandah where they drank a gin and bitters together at six o'clock, he sent a polite note across to the bungalow by a boy. Cooper, however

unwillingly, came in evening dress and Mr. Warburton, though gratified that his wish was respected, noticed with disdain that the young man's clothes were badly cut and his shirt ill-fitting. But Mr. Warburton was in a good temper that evening.

"By the way," he said to him, as he shook hands, "I've talked to my head-boy about finding you someone and he recommends his nephew. I've seen him and he seems a bright and willing lad. Would you like to see him?"

"I don't mind."

"He's waiting now."

Mr. Warburton called his boy and told him to send for his nephew. In a moment a tall, slender youth of twenty appeared. He had large dark eyes and a good profile. He was very neat in his sarong, a little white coat, and a fez, without a tassel, of plum coloured velvet. He answered to the name of Abas. Mr. Warburton looked on him with approval, and his manner insensibly softened as he spoke to him in fluent and idiomatic Malay. He was inclined to be sarcastic with white people, but with the Malays he had a happy mixture of condescension and kindness. He stood in the place of the Sultan. He knew perfectly how to preserve his own dignity, and at the same time put a native at his ease.

"Will he do?" said Mr. Warburton, turning to Cooper.

"Yes, I daresay he's no more of a scoundrel than any of the rest of them."

Mr. Warburton informed the boy that he was engaged, and dismissed him.

"You're very lucky to get a boy like that," he told Cooper. "He belongs to a very good family. They came over from Malacca nearly a hundred years ago."

"I don't much mind if the boy who cleans my shoes and brings me a drink when I want it has blue blood in his veins or not. All I ask is that he should do what I tell him and look sharp about it."

Mr. Warburton pursed his lips, but made no reply.

They went in to dinner. It was excellent, and the wine was good. Its influence presently had its effect on them, and they talked not only without acrimony, but even with friendliness. Mr. Warburton liked to do himself well, and on Sunday night he made it a habit to do himself even a little better than usual. He began to think he was unfair to Cooper. Of course he was not a gentleman, but that was not his fault, and when you got to know him it might be that he would turn out a very good fellow. His faults, perhaps, were faults of manner. And he was certainly good at

his work, quick, conscientious and thorough. When they reached the dessert Mr. Warburton was feeling kindly disposed towards all mankind.

"This is your first Sunday, and I'm going to give you a very special glass of port. I've only got about two dozen of it left and I keep it for special occasions."

He gave his boy instructions and presently the bottle was brought. Mr. Warburton watched the boy open it.

"I got this port from my old friend Charles Hollington. He'd had it for forty years, and I've had it for a good many. He was well-known to have the best cellar in England."

"Is he a wine merchant?"

"Not exactly," smiled Mr. Warburton. "I was speaking of Lord Hollington of Castle Reagh. He's one of the richest peers in England. A very old friend of mine. I was at Eton with his brother."

This was an opportunity that Mr. Warburton could never resist, and he told a little anecdote of which the only point seemed to be that he knew an Earl. The port was certainly very good; he drank a glass and then a second. He lost all caution. He had not talked to a white man for months. He began to tell stories. He showed himself in the company of the great. Hearing him, you would have thought that at one time

ministries were formed and policies decided on his suggestion whispered into the ear of a duchess or thrown over the dinner-table to be gratefully acted on by the confidential adviser of the sovereign. The old days at Ascot, Goodwood and Cowes lived again for him. Another glass of port. There were the great house-parties in Yorkshire and in Scotland to which he went every year.

"I had a man called Foreman then, the best valet I ever had, and why do you think he gave me notice? You know in the Housekeeper's Room the ladies' maids and the gentlemen's gentlemen sit according to the precedence of their masters. He told me he was sick of going to party after party at which I was the only commoner. It meant that he always had to sit at the bottom of the table, and all the best bits were taken before a dish reached him. I told the story to the old Duke of Hereford, and he roared. 'By God, Sir,' he said, 'if I were King of England, I'd make you a Viscount just to give your man a chance.' 'Take him yourself, Duke,' I said. 'He's the best valet I've ever had.' 'Well, Warburton,' he said, 'if he's good enough for you he's good enough for me. Send him along.'"

Then there was Monte Carlo where Mr. Warburton and the Grand Duke Fyodor, playing in partnership, had broken the bank one evening;

and there was Marienbad. At Marienbad Mr. Warburton had played baccarat with Edward VII.

"He was only Prince of Wales then, of course. I remember him saying to me, 'George, if you draw on a five you'll lose your shirt.' He was right; I don't think he ever said a truer word in his life. He was a wonderful man. I always said he was the greatest diplomatist in Europe. But I was a young fool in those days, I hadn't the sense to take his advice. If I had, if I'd never drawn on a five, I daresay I shouldn't be here to-day."

Cooper was watching him. His brown eyes, deep in their sockets, were hard and supercilious, and on his lips was a mocking smile. He had heard a good deal about Mr. Warburton in Kuala Solor, not a bad sort, and he ran his district like clockwork, they said, but by heaven, what a snob! They laughed at him good-naturedly, for it was impossible to dislike a man who was so generous and so kindly, and Cooper had already heard the story of the Prince of Wales and the game of baccarat. But Cooper listened without indulgence. From the beginning he had resented the Resident's manner. He was very sensitive, and he writhed under Mr. Warburton's polite sarcasms. Mr. Warburton had a knack of receiving a remark of which he disapproved with a devastating silence. Cooper had lived little in England and

he had a peculiar dislike of the English. He resented especially the public-school boy since he always feared that he was going to patronise him. He was so much afraid of others putting on airs with him that, in order as it were to get in first, he put on such airs as to make everyone think him insufferably conceited.

"Well, at all events the war has done one good thing for us," he said at last. "It's smashed up the power of the aristocracy. The Boer War started it, and 1914 put the lid on."

"The great families of England are doomed," said Mr. Warburton with the complacent melancholy of an *émigré* who remembered the court of Louis XV. "They cannot afford any longer to live in their splendid palaces and their princely hospitality will soon be nothing but a memory."

"And a damned good job too in my opinion."

"My poor Cooper, what can you know of the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome?"

Mr. Warburton made an ample gesture. His eyes for an instant grew dreamy with a vision of the past.

"Well, believe me, we're fed up with all that rot. What we want is a business government by business men. I was born in a Crown Colony, and I've lived practically all my life in the colonies.

I don't give a row of pins for a lord. What's wrong with England is snobbishness. And if there's anything that gets my goat it's a snob."

A snob! Mr. Warburton's face grew purple and his eyes blazed with anger. That was a word that had pursued him all his life. The great ladies whose society he had enjoyed in his youth were not inclined to look upon his appreciation of themselves as unworthy, but even great ladies are sometimes out of temper and more than once Mr. Warburton had had the dreadful word flung in his teeth. He knew, he could not help knowing, that there were odious people who called him a snob. How unfair it was! Why, there was no vice he found so detestable as snobbishness. After all, he liked to mix with people of his own class, he was only at home in their company, and how in heaven's name could anyone say that was snobbish? Birds of a feather.

"I quite agree with you," he answered. "A snob is a man who admires or despises another because he is of a higher social rank than his own. It is the most vulgar failing of our English middle-class."

He saw a flicker of amusement in Cooper's eyes. Cooper put up his hand to hide the broad smile that rose to his lips, and so made it more noticeable. Mr. Warburton's hands trembled a little.

Probably Cooper never knew how greatly he had offended his chief. A sensitive man himself he was strangely insensitive to the feelings of others.

Their work forced them to see one another for a few minutes now and then during the day, and they met at six to have a drink on Mr. Warburton's verandah. This was an old-established custom of the country which Mr. Warburton would not for the world have broken. But they ate their meals separately, Cooper in his bungalow and Mr. Warburton at the Fort. After the office work was over they walked till dusk fell, but they walked apart. There were but few paths in this country where the jungle pressed close upon the plantations of the village, and when Mr. Warburton caught sight of his assistant passing along with his loose stride, he would make a circuit in order to avoid him. Cooper, with his bad manners, his conceit in his own judgment and his intolerance, had already got on his nerves; but it was not till Cooper had been on the station for a couple of months that an incident happened which turned the Resident's dislike into bitter hatred.

Mr. Warburton was obliged to go up country on a tour of inspection, and he left the station in Cooper's charge with more confidence, since he had definitely come to the conclusion that he was a capable fellow. The only thing he

did not like was that he had no indulgence. He was honest, just and painstaking, but he had no sympathy for the natives. It bitterly amused Mr. Warburton to observe that this man who looked upon himself as every man's equal, should look upon so many men as his own inferiors. He was hard, he had no patience with the native mind, and he was a bully. Mr. Warburton very quickly realised that the Malays disliked and feared him. He was not altogether displeased. He would not have liked it very much if his assistant had enjoyed a popularity which might rival his own. Mr. Warburton made his elaborate preparations, set out on his expedition, and in three weeks returned. Meanwhile the mail had arrived. The first thing that struck his eyes when he entered his sitting-room was a great pile of open newspapers. Cooper had met him, and they went into the room together. Mr. Warburton turned to one of the servants who had been left behind, and sternly asked him what was the meaning of those open papers. Cooper hastened to explain.

"I wanted to read all about the Wolverhampton murder, and so I borrowed your Times. I brought them back again. I knew you wouldn't mind."

Mr. Warburton turned on him, white with anger.

"But I do mind. I mind very much."

"I'm sorry," said Cooper, with composure.

"The fact is, I simply couldn't wait till you came back."

"I wonder you didn't open my letters as well."

Cooper, unmoved, smiled at his chief's exasperation.

"Oh, that's not quite the same thing. After all, I couldn't imagine you'd mind my looking at your newspapers. There's nothing private in them."

"I very much object to anyone reading my paper before me." He went up to the pile. There were nearly thirty numbers there. "I think it extremely impertinent of you. They're all mixed up."

"We can easily put them in order," said Cooper, joining him at the table.

"Don't touch them," cried Mr. Warburton.

"I say, it's childish to make a scene about a little thing like that."

"How dare you speak to me like that?"

"Oh, go to hell," said Cooper, and he flung out of the room.

Mr. Warburton, trembling with passion, was left contemplating his papers. His greatest pleasure in life had been destroyed by those callous, brutal hands. Most people living in out of the way places when the mail comes tear open impatiently their papers and taking the last ones first glance at the latest news from home. Not so Mr. Warburton. His newsagent had instruc-

tions to write on the outside of the wrapper the date of each paper he despatched, and when the great bundle arrived Mr. Warburton looked at these dates and with his blue pencil numbered them. His head-boy's orders were to place one on the table every morning in the verandah with the early cup of tea, and it was Mr. Warburton's especial delight to break the wrapper as he sipped his tea, and read the morning paper. It gave him the illusion of living at home. Every Monday morning he read the Monday Times of six weeks back, and so went through the week. On Sunday he read The Observer. Like his habit of dressing for dinner it was a tie to civilisation. And it was his pride that no matter how exciting the news was he had never yielded to the temptation of opening a paper before its allotted time. During the war the suspense sometimes had been intolerable, and when he read one day that a push was begun he had undergone agonies of suspense which he might have saved himself by the simple expedient of opening a later paper which lay waiting for him on a shelf. It had been the severest trial to which he had ever exposed himself, but he victoriously surmounted it. And that clumsy fool had broken open those neat tight packages because he wanted to know whether some horrid woman had murdered her odious husband.

Mr. Warburton sent for his boy and told him to bring wrappers. He folded up the papers as neatly as he could, placed a wrapper round each and numbered it. But it was a melancholy task.

"I shall never forgive him," he said. "Never."

Of course his boy had been with him on his expedition; he never travelled without him, for his boy knew exactly how he liked things, and Mr. Warburton was not the kind of jungle traveller who was prepared to dispense with his comforts; but in the interval since their arrival he had been gossiping in the servants' quarters. He had learnt that Cooper had had trouble with his boys. All but the youth Abas had left him. Abas had desired to go too, but his uncle had placed him there on the instructions of the Resident, and he was afraid to leave without his uncle's permission.

"I told him he had done well, Tuan," said the boy. "But he is unhappy. He says it is not a good house, and he wishes to know if he may go as the others have gone."

"No, he must stay. The Tuan must have servants. Have those who went been replaced?"

"No, Tuan, no one will go."

Mr. Warburton frowned. Cooper was an insolent fool, but he had an official position and must be suitably provided with servants. It was not

seemly that his house should be improperly conducted.

"Where are the boys who ran away?"

"They are in the kampong, Tuan."

"Go and see them to-night, and tell them that I expect them to be back in Tuan Cooper's house at dawn to-morrow."

"They say they will not go, Tuan."

"On my order?"

The boy had been with Mr. Warburton for fifteen years, and he knew every intonation of his master's voice. He was not afraid of him, they had gone through too much together, once in the jungle the Resident had saved his life, and once, upset in some rapids, but for him the Resident would have been drowned; but he knew when the Resident must be obeyed without question.

"I will go to the kampong," he said.

Mr. Warburton expected that his subordinate would take the first opportunity to apologise for his rudeness, but Cooper had the ill-bred man's inability to express regret; and when they met next morning in the office he ignored the incident. Since Mr. Warburton had been away for three weeks it was necessary for them to have a somewhat prolonged interview. At the end of it, Mr. Warburton dismissed him.

"I don't think there's anything else, thank you."

Cooper turned to go, but Mr. Warburton stopped him. "I understand you've been having some trouble with your boys."

Cooper gave a harsh laugh.

"They tried to blackmail me. They had the damned cheek to run away, all except that incompetent fellow Abas—he knew when he was well off—but I just sat tight. They've all come to heel again."

"What do you mean by that?"

"This morning they were all back on their jobs, the Chinese cook and all. There they were, as cool as cucumbers; you would have thought they owned the place. I suppose they'd come to the conclusion that I wasn't such a fool as I looked."

"By no means. They came back on my express order."

Cooper flushed slightly.

"I should be obliged if you wouldn't interfere with my private concerns."

"They're not your private concerns. When your servants run away it makes you ridiculous. You are perfectly free to make a fool of yourself, but I cannot allow you to be made a fool of. It is unseemly that your house should not be properly staffed. As soon as I heard that your boys had left you, I had them told to be back in their places at dawn. That'll do."

Mr. Warburton nodded to signify that the interview was at an end. Cooper took no notice.

"Shall I tell you what I did? I called them and gave the whole bally lot the sack. I gave them ten minutes to get out of the compound."

Mr. Warburton shrugged his shoulders.

"What makes you think you can get others?"

"I've told my own clerk to see about it."

Mr. Warburton reflected for a moment.

"I think you behaved very foolishly. You will do well to remember in future that good masters make good servants."

"Is there anything else you want to teach me?"

"I should like to teach you manners, but it would be an arduous task, and I have not the time to waste. I will see that you get boys."

"Please don't put yourself to any trouble on my account. I'm quite capable of getting them for myself."

Mr. Warburton smiled acidly. He had an inkling that Cooper disliked him as much as he disliked Cooper, and he knew that nothing is more galling than to be forced to accept the favours of a man you detest.

"Allow me to tell you that you have no more chance of getting Malay or Chinese servants here now than you have of getting an English butler or a French chef. No one will come to you except

on an order from me. Would you like me to give it?"

"No."

"As you please. Good morning."

Mr. Warburton watched the development of the situation with acrid humour. Cooper's clerk was unable to persuade Malay, Dyak or Chinese to enter the house of such a master. Abas, the boy who remained faithful to him, knew how to cook only native food, and Cooper, a coarse feeder, found his gorge rise against the everlasting rice. There was no water-carrier, and in that great heat he needed several baths a day. He cursed Abas, but Abas opposed him with sullen resistance and would not do more than he chose. It was galling to know that the lad stayed with him only because the Resident insisted. This went on for a fortnight and then, one morning, he found in his house the very servants whom he had previously dismissed. He fell into a violent rage, but he had learnt a little sense, and this time, without a word, he let them stay. He swallowed his humiliation, but the impatient contempt he had felt for Mr. Warburton's idiosyncrasies changed into a sullen hatred: the Resident with this malicious stroke had made him the laughing stock of all the natives.

The two men now held no communication with one another. They broke the time-honoured cus-

tom of sharing, notwithstanding personal dislike, a drink at six o'clock with any white man who happened to be at the station. Each lived in his own house as though the other did not exist. Now that Cooper had fallen into the work, it was necessary for them to have little to do with one another in the office. Mr. Warburton used his orderly to send any message he had to give his assistant, and his instructions he sent by formal letter. They saw one another constantly, that was inevitable, but did not exchange half a dozen words in a week. The fact that they could not avoid catching sight of one another got on their nerves. They brooded over their antagonism, and Mr. Warburton, taking his daily walk, could think of nothing but how much he detested his assistant.

And the dreadful thing was that in all probability they would remain thus, facing each other in deadly enmity, till Mr. Warburton went on leave. It might be three years. He had no reason to send in a complaint to headquarters: Cooper did his work very well, and at that time men were hard to get. True, vague complaints reached him and hints that the natives found Cooper harsh. There was certainly a feeling of dissatisfaction among them. But when Mr. Warburton looked into specific cases, all he could say was that Cooper had shown severity where mildness would not have been

misplaced, and had been unfeeling when himself would have been sympathetic. He had done nothing for which he could be taken to task. But Mr. Warburton watched him. Hatred will often make a man clear-sighted, and he had a suspicion that Cooper was using the natives without consideration, yet keeping within the law, because he felt that thus he could exasperate his chief. One day perhaps he would go too far. None knew better than Mr. Warburton how irritable the incessant heat could make a man and how difficult it was to keep one's self-control after a sleepless night. He smiled softly to himself. Sooner or later Cooper would deliver himself into his hand.

When at last the opportunity came, Mr. Warburton laughed aloud. Cooper had charge of the prisoners; they made roads, built sheds, rowed when it was necessary to send the prahu up or down stream, kept the town clean and otherwise usefully employed themselves. If well-behaved they even on occasion served as house-boys. Cooper kept them hard at it. He liked to see them work. He took pleasure in devising tasks for them; and seeing quickly enough that they were being made to do useless things the prisoners worked badly. He punished them by lengthening their hours. This was contrary to the regulations, and as soon as it was brought to the attention of Mr. Warburton,

without referring the matter back to his subordinate, he gave instructions that the old hours should be kept; Cooper, going out for his walk, was astounded to see the prisoners strolling back to the jail; he had given instructions that they were not to knock off till dusk. When he asked the warder in charge why they had left off work he was told that it was the Resident's bidding.

White with rage he strode to the Fort. Mr. Warburton, in his spotless white ducks and his neat topee, with a walking-stick in his hand, followed by his dogs, was on the point of starting out on his afternoon stroll. He had watched Cooper go, and knew that he had taken the road by the river. Cooper jumped up the steps and went straight up to the Resident.

"I want to know what the hell you mean by countermanding my order that the prisoners were to work till six," he burst out, beside himself with fury.

Mr. Warburton opened his cold blue eyes very wide and assumed an expression of great surprise.

"Are you out of your mind? Are you so ignorant that you do not know that that is not the way to speak to your official superior?"

"Oh, go to hell. The prisoners are my pidgin, and you've got no right to interfere. You mind your business and I'll mind mine. I want to know

what the devil you mean by making a damned fool of me. Everyone in the place will know that you've countermanded my order."

Mr. Warburton kept very cool.

"You had no power to give the order you did. I countermanded it because it was harsh and tyrannical. Believe me, I have not made half such a damned fool of you as you have made of yourself."

"You disliked me from the first moment I came here. You've done everything you could to make the place impossible for me because I wouldn't lick your boots for you. You got your knife into me because I wouldn't flatter you."

Cooper, spluttering with rage, was nearing dangerous ground, and Mr. Warburton's eyes grew on a sudden colder and more piercing.

"You are wrong. I thought you were a cad, but I was perfectly satisfied with the way you did your work."

"You snob. You damned snob. You thought me a cad because I hadn't been to Eton. Oh, they told me in K.S. what to expect. Why, don't you know that you're the laughing-stock of the whole country? I could hardly help bursting into a roar of laughter when you told your celebrated story about the Prince of Wales. My God, how they shouted at the club when they told it. By God, I'd rather be the cad I am than the snob you are."

He got Mr. Warburton on the raw.

"If you don't get out of my house this minute I shall knock you down," he cried.

The other came a little closer to him and put his face in his.

"Touch me, touch me," he said. "By God, I'd like to see you hit me. Do you want me to say it again? Snob. Snob."

Cooper was three inches taller than Mr. Warburton, a strong, muscular young man. Mr. Warburton was fat and fifty-four. His clenched fist shot out. Cooper caught him by the arm and pushed him back.

"Don't be a damned fool. Remember I'm not a gentleman. I know how to use my hands."

He gave a sort of hoot, and grinning all over his pale, sharp face jumped down the verandah steps. Mr. Warburton, his heart in his anger pounding against his ribs, sank exhausted into a chair. His body tingled as though he had prickly heat. For one horrible moment he thought he was going to cry. But suddenly he was conscious that his head-boy was on the verandah and instinctively regained control of himself. The boy came forward and filled him a glass of whisky and soda. Without a word Mr. Warburton took it and drank it to the dregs.

"What do you want to say to me?" asked Mr.

Warburton, trying to force a smile on to his strained lips.

"Tuan, the assistant tuan is a bad man. Abas wishes again to leave him."

"Let him wait a little. I shall write to Kuala Solor and ask that Tuan Cooper should go elsewhere."

"Tuan Cooper is not good with the Malays."

"Leave me."

The boy silently withdrew. Mr. Warburton was left alone with his thoughts. He saw the club at Kuala Solor, the men sitting round the table in the window in their flannels, when the night had driven them in from golf and tennis, drinking whiskies and gin pahits, and laughing when they told the celebrated story of the Prince of Wales and himself at Marienbad. He was hot with shame and misery. A snob! They all thought him a snob. And he had always thought them very good fellows, he had always been gentleman enough to let it make no difference to him that they were of very second-rate position. He hated them now. But his hatred for them was nothing compared with his hatred for Cooper. And if it had come to blows Cooper could have thrashed him. Tears of mortification ran down his red, fat face. He sat there for a couple of hours smoking cigarette after cigarette, and he wished he were dead.

At last the boy came back and asked him if he would dress for dinner. Of course! He always dressed for dinner. He rose wearily from his chair and put on his stiff shirt and the high collar. He sat down at the prettily decorated table, and was waited on as usual by the two boys while two others waved their great fans. Over there in the bungalow, two hundred yards away, Cooper was eating a filthy meal clad only in a sarong and a baju. His feet were bare and while he ate he probably read a detective story. After dinner Mr Warburton sat down to write a letter. The Sultan was away, but he wrote, privately and confidentially, to his representative. Cooper did his work very well, he said, but the fact was that he couldn't get on with him. They were getting dreadfully on each other's nerves and he would look upon it as a very great favour if Cooper could be transferred to another post.

He despatched the letter next morning by special messenger. The answer came a fortnight later with the month's mail. It was a private note, and ran as follows:—

“ My dear Warburton,

I do not want to answer your letter officially, and so I am writing you a few lines myself. Of course if you insist I will put the matter up to the Sultan, but I think you would be much wiser to drop

it. I know Cooper is a rough diamond, but he is capable, and he had a pretty thin time in the war, and I think he should be given every chance. I think you are a little too much inclined to attach importance to a man's social position. You must remember that times have changed. Of course it's a very good thing for a man to be a gentleman, but it's better that he should be competent and hard-working. I think if you'll exercise a little tolerance you'll get on very well with Cooper.

Yours very sincerely,

Richard Temple."

The letter dropped from Mr. Warburton's hand. It was easy to read between the lines. Dick Temple, whom he had known for twenty years, Dick Temple who came from quite a good county family, thought him a snob, and for that reason had no patience with his request. Mr. Warburton felt on a sudden discouraged with life. The world of which he was a part had passed away and the future belonged to a meaner generation. Cooper represented it and Cooper he hated with all his heart. He stretched out his hand to fill his glass, and at the gesture his head-boy stepped forward.

"I didn't know you were there."

The boy picked up the official letter. Ah, that was why he was waiting.

"Does Tuan Cooper go, Tuan?"

"No."

"There will be a misfortune."

For a moment the words conveyed nothing to his lassitude. But only for a moment. He sat up in his chair and looked at the boy. He was all attention.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Tuan Cooper is not behaving rightly with Abas."

Mr. Warburton shrugged his shoulders. How should a man like Cooper know how to treat servants? Mr. Warburton knew the type: he would be grossly familiar with them at one moment and rude and inconsiderate the next.

"Let Abas go back to his family."

"Tuan Cooper holds back his wages so that he may not run away. He has paid him nothing for three months. I tell him to be patient. But he is angry, he will not listen to reason. If the Tuan continues to use him ill there will be a misfortune."

"You were right to tell me."

The fool! Did he know so little of the Malays as to think he could safely injure them? It would serve him damned well right if he got a kriss in his back. A kriss Mr. Warburton's heart seemed on a sudden to miss a beat. He had only to let things

take their course and one fine day he would be rid of Cooper. He smiled faintly as the phrase, a masterly inactivity, crossed his mind. And now his heart beat a little quicker, for he saw the man he hated lying on his face in a pathway of the jungle with a knife in his back. A fit end for the cad and the bully. Mr. Warburton sighed. It was his duty to warn him, and of course he must do it. He wrote a brief and formal note to Cooper asking him to come to the Fort at once.

In ten minutes Cooper stood before him. They had not spoken to one another since the day when Mr. Warburton had nearly struck him. He did not now ask him to sit down.

"Did you wish to see me?" asked Cooper.

He was untidy and none too clean. His face and hands were covered with little red blotches where mosquitoes had bitten him and he had scratched himself till the blood came. His long, thin face bore a sullen look.

"I understand that you are again having trouble with your servants. Abas, my head-boy's nephew, complains that you have held back his wages for three months. I consider it a most arbitrary proceeding. The lad wishes to leave you, and I certainly do not blame him. I must insist on your paying what is due to him."

"I don't choose that he should leave me. I am

holding back his wages as a pledge of his good behaviour."

"You do not know the Malay character. The Malays are very sensitive to injury and ridicule. They are passionate and revengeful. It is my duty to warn you that if you drive this boy beyond a certain point you run a great risk."

Cooper gave a contemptuous chuckle.

"What do you think he'll do?"

"I think he'll kill you."

"Why should you mind?"

"Oh, I wouldn't," replied Mr. Warburton, with a faint laugh. "I should bear it with the utmost fortitude. But I feel the official obligation to give you a proper warning."

"Do you think I'm afraid of a damned nigger?"

"It's a matter of entire indifference to me."

"Well, let me tell you this, I know how to take care of myself; that boy Abas is a dirty, thieving rascal, and if he tries any monkey tricks on me, by God, I'll wring his bloody neck."

"That was all I wished to say to you," said Mr. Warburton. "Good evening."

Mr. Warburton gave him a little nod of dismissal. Cooper flushed, did not for a moment know what to say or do, turned on his heel and stumbled out of the room. Mr. Warburton watched him go with an icy smile on his lips. He had done his

duty. But what would he have thought had he known that when Cooper got back to his bungalow, so silent and cheerless, he threw himself down on his bed and in his bitter loneliness on a sudden lost all control of himself? Painful sobs tore his chest and heavy tears rolled down his thin cheeks.

After this Mr. Warburton seldom saw Cooper, and never spoke to him. He read his Times every morning, did his work at the office, took his exercise, dressed for dinner, dined and sat by the river smoking his cheroot. If by chance he ran across Cooper he cut him dead. Each, though never for a moment unconscious of the propinquity, acted as though the other did not exist. Time did nothing to assuage their animosity. They watched one another's actions and each knew what the other did. Though Mr. Warburton had been a keen shot in his youth, with age he had acquired a distaste for killing the wild things of the jungle, but on Sundays and holidays Cooper went out with his gun: if he got something it was a triumph over Mr. Warburton; if not, Mr. Warburton shrugged his shoulders and chuckled. These counter-jumpers trying to be sportsmen! Christmas was a bad time for both of them: they ate their dinners alone, each in his own quarters, and they got deliberately drunk. They were the only white men within two hundred miles and they lived within shouting

distance of each other. At the beginning of the year Cooper went down with fever, and when Mr. Warburton caught sight of him again he was surprised to see how thin he had grown. He looked ill and worn. The solitude, so much more unnatural because it was due to no necessity, was getting on his nerves. It was getting on Mr. Warburton's too, and often he could not sleep at night. He lay awake brooding. Cooper was drinking heavily and surely the breaking point was near; but in his dealings with the natives he took care to do nothing that might expose him to his chief's rebuke. They fought a grim and silent battle with one another. It was a test of endurance. The months passed, and neither gave sign of weakening. They were like men dwelling in regions of eternal night, and their souls were oppressed with the knowledge that never would the day dawn for them. It looked as though their lives would continue for ever in this dull and hideous monotony of hatred.

And when at last the inevitable happened it came upon Mr. Warburton with all the shock of the unexpected. Cooper accused the boy Abas of stealing some of his clothes, and when the boy denied the theft took him by the scruff of the neck and kicked him down the steps of the bungalow. The boy demanded his wages and Cooper flung at his head

every word of abuse he knew. If he saw him in the compound in an hour he would hand him over to the police. Next morning the boy waylaid him outside the Fort when he was walking over to his office, and again demanded his wages. Cooper struck him in the face with his clenched fist. The boy fell to the ground and got up with blood streaming from his nose.

Cooper walked on and set about his work. But he could not attend to it. The blow had calmed his irritation, and he knew that he had gone too far. He was worried. He felt ill, miserable and discouraged. In the adjoining office sat Mr. Warburton, and his impulse was to go and tell him what he had done; he made a movement in his chair, but he knew with what icy scorn he would listen to the story. He could see his patronising smile. For a moment he had an uneasy fear of what Abas might do. Warburton had warned him all right. He sighed. What a fool he had been! But he shrugged his shoulders impatiently. He did not care; a fat lot he had to live for. It was all Warburton's fault; if he hadn't put his back up nothing like this would have happened. Warburton had made life a hell for him from the start. The snob. But they were all like that: it was because he was a Colonial. It was a damned shame that he had never got his commission in the war; he

was as good as anyone else. They were a lot of dirty snobs. He was damned if he was going to knuckle under now. Of course Warburton would hear of what had happened; the old devil knew everything. He wasn't afraid. He wasn't afraid of any Malay in Borneo, and Warburton could go to blazes.

He was right in thinking that Mr. Warburton would know what had happened. His head-boy told him when he went in to tiffin.

"Where is your nephew now?"

"I do not know, Tuan. He has gone."

Mr. Warburton remained silent. After luncheon as a rule he slept a little, but to-day he found himself very wide awake. His eyes involuntarily sought the bungalow where Cooper was now resting.

The idiot! Hesitation for a little was in Mr. Warburton's mind. Did the man know in what peril he was? He supposed he ought to send for him. But each time he had tried to reason with Cooper, Cooper had insulted him. Anger, furious anger welled up suddenly in Mr. Warburton's heart, so that the veins on his temples stood out and he clenched his fists. The cad had had his warning. Now let him take what was coming to him. It was no business of his, and if anything happened it was not his fault. But perhaps they would

wish in Kuala Solor that they had taken his advice and transferred Cooper to another station.

He was strangely restless that night. After dinner he walked up and down the verandah. When the boy went away to his own quarters, Mr. Warburton asked him whether anything had been seen of Abas.

"No, Tuan, I think maybe he has gone to the village of his mother's brother."

Mr. Warburton gave him a sharp glance, but the boy was looking down, and their eyes did not meet. Mr. Warburton went down to the river and sat in his arbour. But peace was denied him. The river flowed ominously silent. It was like a great serpent gliding with sluggish movement towards the sea. And the trees of the jungle over the water were heavy with a breathless menace. No bird sang. No breeze ruffled the leaves of the cassias. All around him it seemed as though something waited.

He walked across the garden to the road. He had Cooper's bungalow in full view from there. There was a light in his sitting-room, and across the road floated the sound of rag-time. Cooper was playing his gramophone. Mr. Warburton shuddered; he had never got over his instinctive dislike of that instrument. But for that he would have gone over and spoken to Cooper. He turned and went back to his own house. He read late

into the night, and at last he slept. But he did not sleep very long, he had terrible dreams, and he seemed to be awakened by a cry. Of course that was a dream too, for no cry—from the bungalow for instance—could be heard in his room. He lay awake till dawn. Then he heard hurried steps and the sound of voices, his head-boy burst suddenly into the room without his fez, and Mr. Warburton's heart stood still.

“Tuan, Tuan.”

Mr. Warburton jumped out of bed.

“I'll come at once.”

He put on his slippers, and in his sarong and pyjama-jacket walked across his compound and into Cooper's. Cooper was lying in bed, with his mouth open, and a kriss sticking in his heart. He had been killed in his sleep. Mr. Warburton started, but not because he had not expected to see just such a sight, he started because he felt in himself a sudden glow of exultation. A great burden had been lifted from his shoulders.

Cooper was quite cold. Mr. Warburton took the kriss out of the wound, it had been thrust in with such force that he had to use an effort to get it out, and looked at it. He recognised it. It was a kriss that a dealer had offered him some weeks before, and which he knew Cooper had bought.

“Where is Abas?” he asked sternly.

"Abas is at the village of his mother's brother."

The sergeant of the native police was standing at the foot of the bed.

"Take two men and go to the village and arrest him."

Mr. Warburton did what was immediately necessary. With set face he gave orders. His words were short and peremptory. Then he went back to the Fort. He shaved and had his bath, dressed and went into the dining-room. By the side of his plate *The Times* in its wrapper lay waiting for him. He helped himself to some fruit. The head boy poured out his tea while the second handed him a dish of eggs. Mr. Warburton ate with a good appetite. The head boy waited.

"What is it?" asked Mr. Warburton.

"Tuan, Abas, my nephew, was in the house of his mother's brother all night. It can be proved. His uncle will swear that he did not leave the kampong."

Mr. Warburton turned upon him with a frown.

"Tuan Cooper was killed by Abas. You know it as well as I know it. Justice must be done."

"Tuan, you would not hang him?"

Mr. Warburton hesitated an instant, and though his voice remained set and stern a change came into his eyes. It was a flicker which the Malay

was quick to notice and across his own eyes flashed an answering look of understanding.

"The provocation was very great. Abas will be sentenced to a term of imprisonment." There was a pause while Mr. Warburton helped himself to marmalade. "When he has served a part of his sentence in prison I will take him into this house as a boy. You can train him in his duties. I have no doubt that in the house of Tuan Cooper he got into bad habits."

"Shall Abas give himself up, Tuan?"

"It would be wise of him."

The boy withdrew. Mr. Warburton took his Times and neatly slit the wrapper. He loved to unfold the heavy, rustling pages. The morning, so fresh and cool, was delicious and for a moment his eyes wandered out over the garden with a friendly glance. A great weight had been lifted from his mind. He turned to the columns in which were announced the births, deaths, and marriages. That was what he always looked at first. A name he knew caught his attention. Lady Ormskirk had had a son at last. By George, how pleased the old dowager must be! He would write her a note of congratulation by the next mail.

Abas would make a very good house-boy.

That fool Cooper?





CATHERINE PARR
THE REHEARSAL
KING ALFRED AND THE NEAT-HERD
from
DIMINUTIVE DRAMAS
by
MAURICE BARING

CATHERINE PARR

OR

ALEXANDER'S HORSE

SCENE.—*London. Breakfast chamber in the Palace.*
KING HENRY VIII and CATHERINE PARR are
discovered sitting opposite to each other at the
breakfast table. The KING has just cracked a
boiled egg.

KING HENRY. My egg's raw. It really is too bad.

CATHERINE. Yesterday you complained of their being hard.

KING HENRY. And so they were. I don't want a hard egg, and I don't want a raw egg. I want them to be cooked just right.

CATHERINE. You are very difficult to please. The egg was in boiling water for three minutes and a half. I boiled it myself. But give it me. I like them like that. I will boil you another.

KING HENRY. No, it's too late now. But it is a fact that you have no idea how to boil an egg. I wish you'd let them do them in the kitchen.

CATHERINE. If they're done in the kitchen you

complain because they're not here when you come down, and if they are here, you say they're cold.

KING HENRY. I never say anything of the kind. The cook boils eggs beautifully.

CATHERINE. She shall boil them to-morrow.

KING HENRY. One would have thought that a woman of your experience might at least know how to boil an egg. I hate a watery egg. (*Pensively*) Poor dear Katie used to boil eggs beautifully.

CATHERINE. Do you mean Catherine Howard or Katharine of Aragon?

KING HENRY. I was alluding to poor, dear, misguided Katie Howard. Katharine of Aragon never was my wife. The marriage was not valid.

CATHERINE. Well, Catherine Howard ought to have known how to boil eggs, considering her mother was a kitchenmaid.

KING HENRY. That is utterly untrue. Her mother was a Rochford.

CATHERINE. You're thinking of Anne Bullen.

KING HENRY. Yes, yes, to be sure, Katie's mother was a Somerset.

CATHERINE. You're thinking of Jane Seymour.

KING HENRY. Not at all. Jane Seymour was a sister of Somerset's.

CATHERINE. All I know is that Catherine Howard's mother was a kitchenmaid. And I think it's very unkind of you to mention her to me. I suppose you mean that you wish she were alive, and that you loved her better than you love me.

KING HENRY. I never said anything of the kind. All I said was that she knew how to boil eggs.

CATHERINE. You clearly meant to say that she had all the qualities which I lack.

KING HENRY. You are most unfair. I never meant to hint at any such thing. All I said was that I hate a watery egg, and my egg this morning was raw.

CATHERINE (*rising and going to the door in a temper*). Well, the best thing you can do is to get rid of me, and to marry some one who knows how to boil an egg.

KING HENRY. Catherine, come back! I really didn't mean to offend you. You know how to boil eggs very well.

CATHERINE (*sitting down*). One takes an endless amount of trouble, and that's all the thanks one gets. Don't think that I shall ever boil your eggs for you again, because I shan't.

KING HENRY. I was thinking we might have a little music this morning. I have composed a new ballad which I should like to try over with you. It's for viol and lute and voice. We might try it.

CATHERINE. I'm not sure if I have time. What is it called?

KING HENRY. It's called "The Triumph of Love," and it begins:

Come list to Alexander's deed,
Great Jove's immortal son,
Who, riding on a snow-white steed,
To Babylon did come.

CATHERINE. "Son" doesn't rhyme with "come."

KING HENRY. It's not meant to. It's assonance.

CATHERINE. Do you mean Alexander the Great?

KING HENRY. Yes, of course.

CATHERINE. The only thing is, his horse was black.

KING HENRY. No, my dear, you're mistaken; his horse was white.

CATHERINE. Black—black as jet.

KING HENRY. But I know for a fact it was white.

CATHERINE. Alexander's horse was black. Everybody knows it was black.

KING HENRY. It was white. You can ask any one you like.

CATHERINE. It was black. He was famous for his black horse. There are hundreds of pictures of him on his *black* horse—my father has got one.

KING HENRY. Then the painter made a mistake. Plutarch, Xenophon, Aristotle all mention his *white* horse.

CATHERINE. Black.

KING HENRY. But, my dear, how obstinate you are! I *know* it is white——

CATHERINE. Black, *coal*-black.

KING HENRY. Have you read Xenophon?

CATHERINE. You are thinking of something else. Even when we were children my father always showed us the picture of Alexander's *black* horse.

KING HENRY. Well, I can easily prove it to you. There's a Plutarch here in the bookcase. (*He goes to the bookcase and takes out a book.*)

CATHERINE. I remember it particularly well because my brother had a black horse and we called it "Bucephalus," after Alexander's *black* horse.

KING HENRY (*turning over the leaves of the book*). If it had been black it would never have been called Bucephalus—it would be absurd to call a black horse Bucephalus.

CATHERINE. Not so absurd as calling a white horse Bucephalus.

KING HENRY. He would never have chosen a black horse. He was superstitious——

CATHERINE. Just because you're superstitious and believe in Saints, and worship images, you think every one else is. As a matter of fact, he chose a black horse on purpose to show he didn't care a pin about superstitions——

KING HENRY. Here it is——“*χαλεπὸς εἶναι καὶ κομιδῇ δύσχρηστος*”——“The horse was wild and extremely difficult to manage.” In fact, he had all the characteristics of the white Thessalian horses of that day.

CATHERINE. But it doesn't say it was white. And Thessalian horses are famous for being black.

KING HENRY. You really are too obstinate for words. I will find you the proofs in Xenophon. It is distinctly stated that the horse is *white*. It is an historical fact. Nobody has ever disputed it.

CATHERINE. But Plutarch, you see, practically says it was black.

KING HENRY. Plutarch says nothing of the kind. Besides, I now remember talking about this with Wolsey, who was an excellent scholar. I distinctly remember his saying one day: “As white as Bucephalus.” It's quite a common phrase among scholars.

CATHERINE. He must have said “As black as Bucephalus.”

KING HENRY. Of course, if you mean to say I tell lies——

CATHERINE. I don't mean that you tell lies, but you are mistaken—that's all.

KING HENRY. But I tell you that there is no mistake possible. I know it as well as I know my own name.

CATHERINE. Your memory plays you tricks. Just now you couldn't remember Catherine Howard's mother's name.

KING HENRY. That's nothing to do with it. Besides, I did remember it. I made a slip, that's all. But this is an historical fact which I've known all my life.

CATHERINE. I quite understand your memory failing you. You have so many names to remember. I expect you were confusing Alexander's black horse with King Alfred's white horse—the white horse of Wantage.

KING HENRY. Good gracious! If you had a smattering of education you wouldn't say such things! It comes of having no religion and no education, and of not knowing Latin. A Lutheran education is worse than none. Even Anne of Cleves knew Latin.

CATHERINE. Thank Heavens, I don't know Latin! Stupid, superstitious language, fit only for bigots and monks!

KING HENRY. I suppose you mean I am a bigot. ✓

CATHERINE. You can turn what one says into meaning anything you like. As a matter of fact, all I said was that the horse was black.

KING HENRY. I'd rather be a bigot than a Lutheran heretic.

CATHERINE. You know you're wrong and you try to escape the point. That's just like a Tudor. No Tudor could ever listen to reason.

KING HENRY. I must ask you not to insult my family.

CATHERINE. You've insulted mine, which is a

far older one. My family has no blood on its escutcheon.

KING HENRY. I won't stand this any longer. (*He gets up, opens the door, and calls*) Denny, Butts, Page, who is there?

Enter a PAGE

PAGE. Your Majesty.

KING HENRY. Go and tell the Lord Chamberlain to make the necessary arrangements for transporting the Ex-Queen to the Tower.

PAGE (*puzzled*). Yes, your Majesty. Does your Majesty mean the late Queen's remains? "

KING HENRY. I said the *Ex-Queen*, you stupid boy—Queen Catherine Parr.

PAGE. Yes, your Majesty.

KING HENRY. And tell him to give orders to the Governor of the Tower to have everything ready for the Ex-Queen's execution.

PAGE. Is the same ceremonial to be observed as in the case of Queen Catherine Howard, your Majesty?

KING HENRY. Yes; only there need only be one roll of drums instead of two—at the end. (*The PAGE goes to the door.*) And on the way ask Dr. Butts whether Alexander the Great's horse was black or white.

CATHERINE. It was black. (*The PAGE bows and goes out.*) Well, since I'm to be executed, I daresay you will allow me to go and pack up my things. By the way, you left your lute in my sitting-room yesterday. I will bring it down.

KING HENRY. Wait a minute, there's no hurry.

CATHERINE. I beg your pardon, I have very little time, and a great many letters to write.

KING HENRY (*hesitating*). And I wanted to have some music.

CATHERINE. You don't expect me to accompany you now, I suppose? You had better find some one else. I have got other things to think about during my last moments on earth.

KING HENRY (*laughing uneasily*). I was only joking, of course, my dear. You don't mean to say you took it seriously.

CATHERINE. I am afraid I don't appreciate that kind of joke.

KING HENRY. Come, come; let bygones be bygones, and let us have some music. I want to play you my ballad.

Enter the PAGE

PAGE. If you please, your Majesty, I can't find the Lord Chamberlain, and Dr. Butts says your Majesty was quite correct as to the colour of Alexander the Great's horse.

KING HENRY (*beaming*). Very good; you can go. You need not deliver the message to the Lord Chamberlain. (*The PAGE bows and retires.*) And now, my dear, we'll go and play. You see, I knew I was right.

[*The KING opens the door with a bow.*]

CATHERINE. It was black, all the same.

KING HENRY (*indulgently, as if speaking to a child*). Yes, yes, my dear, of course it was black, but let's go and have some music.

[*They go out*]

CURTAIN.

VII

THE REHEARSAL

SCENE.—*The Globe Theatre, 1595. On the stage the AUTHOR, the PRODUCER, and the STAGE MANAGER are standing. A rehearsal of "Macbeth" is about to begin. Waiting in the wings are the actors who are playing the WITCHES, BANQUO, MACDUFF, etc. They are all men.*

THE STAGE MANAGER. We'd better begin with the last act.

THE PRODUCER. I think we'll begin with the first act. We've never done it all through yet.

THE STAGE MANAGER. Mr. Colman isn't here. It's no good doing the first act without Duncan.

THE PRODUCER. Where is Mr. Colman? Did you let him know about rehearsal?

THE STAGE MANAGER. I sent a messenger to his house in Gray's Inn.

THE FIRST WITCH. Mr. Colman is playing Psyche in a masque at Kenilworth. He won't be back until the day after to-morrow.

THE PRODUCER. That settles it. We'll begin with the fifth act.

THE FIRST WITCH. Then I suppose I can go.

THE SECOND WITCH. } And I suppose we

THE THIRD WITCH } needn't wait.

THE STAGE MANAGER. Certainly not. We're going on to the fourth act as soon as we've done the fifth.

BANQUO. But I suppose you don't want me.

THE STAGE MANAGER. And what about your ghost entrance in Act IV? We must get the business right this time; besides, we'll do the second act if we've time. Now, Act V, Mr. Thomas and Mr. Bowles, please.

THE FIRST WITCH. Mr. Bowles can't come to-day. He told me to tell you. He's having a tooth pulled out.

THE STAGE MANAGER. Then will you read the waiting gentlewoman's part, Mr. Lyle. You can take this scrip.

[*The FIRST WITCH takes the scrip.*

Where is Mr. Thomas?

THE FIRST WITCH. He said he was coming.

THE STAGE MANAGER. We can't wait. I'll read his part. We'll leave out the beginning and just give Mr. Hughes his cue.

THE FIRST WITCH (*reading*). "Having no witness to confirm my speech."

THE STAGE MANAGER. Mr. HUGHES.

THE FIRST WITCH. He was here a moment ago.

THE STAGE MANAGER (*louder*). Mr. Hughes.

Enter LADY MACBETH (MR. HUGHES, a young man about 24)

LADY MACBETH. Sorry. (*He comes on down some steps L.C.*)

THE PRODUCER. That will never do, Mr. Hughes; there's no necessity to sway as if you

were intoxicated, and you mustn't look at your feet. ✓

LADY MACBETH. It's the steps. They're so rickety.

THE PRODUCER. We'll begin again from "speech."

[LADY MACBETH comes on again. He looks straight in front of him and falls heavily on to the ground.]

I said those steps were to be mended yesterday.

[The FIRST WITCH is convulsed with laughter.]

LADY MACBETH. There's nothing to laugh at.

THE PRODUCER. Are you hurt, Mr. Hughes?

LADY MACBETH. Not much. (*The steps are replaced by two supers.*)

THE PRODUCER. Now from "speech."

[Mr. HUGHES comes on again.]

THE PRODUCER. You must not hold the taper upside down.

LADY MACBETH. How can I rub my hands and hold a taper too? What's the use of the taper?

THE PRODUCER. You can rub the back of your hand. You needn't wash your hands in the air. That's better.

[*The dialogue between the DOCTOR and the GENTLEWOMAN proceeds until LADY MACBETH'S cue: "hour."*]

Enter the DOCTOR (Mr. THOMAS). He waits R.

LADY MACBETH. "Here's a damned spot."

THE STAGE MANAGER. No, no, Mr. Hughes, "Yet here's a spot."

THE PRODUCER. Begin again from "hands."

GENTLEWOMAN. "It is an accustomed action with her, to seem thus washing her hands. I've known her to continue in this three-quarters of an hour."

LADY MACBETH. "Yet here's a damned spot."

THE STAGE MANAGER. It's not "damned" at all. That comes later.

LADY MACBETH. It's catchy. Couldn't I say "mark" instead of "spot" in the first line?

THE DOCTOR (*coming forward*). That would entirely spoil the effect of my "Hark!" You see "mark" rhymes with "Hark." It's impossible.

THE PRODUCER. Oh! It's you, Mr. Thomas. Will you go straight on. We'll do the whole scene over presently. Now from "hour."

LADY MACBETH. "Yes, here's a spot."

THE STAGE MANAGER. It's not "Yes," but "Yet," Mr. Hughes.

LADY MACBETH. "Yet here's a spot."

THE DOCTOR (*at the top of his voice*) "Hark!"

THE PRODUCER. Not so loud, Mr. Thomas, that would wake her up.

THE DOCTOR (*in a high falsetto*). "Har-r-rk! She spe-e-e-aks. I will . . . set . . . down."

THE PRODUCER. You needn't bleat that "speaks," Mr. Thomas, and the second part of that line is cut.

THE DOCTOR. It's not cut in my part. "Hark, she speaks."

LADY MACBETH. "Yet here's a spot."

THE STAGE MANAGER. No, Mr. Hughes; "out damned spot."

LADY MACBETH. Sorry.

THE PRODUCER. We must get that right. Now from "hour."

LADY MACBETH. "Yet here's a spot."

THE DOCTOR. "Hark! she speaks."

LADY MACBETH. "Get out, damned spot! Get out, I say! One, two, three, four: why there's plenty of time to do't. Oh! Hell! Fie, fie, my Lord! a soldier and a beard! What have we got to fear when none can call our murky power to swift account withal? You'd never have thought the old man had so much blood in him!"

THE AUTHOR. I don't think you've got those lines quite right yet, Mr. Hughes.

LADY MACBETH. What's wrong?

THE STAGE MANAGER. There's no "get." It's "one; two": and not "one, two, three, four." Then it's "Hell is murky." And there's no "plenty." And it's "a soldier and *afear'd*," and not "a soldier and a *beard*."

THE AUTHOR. And after that you made two lines into rhymed verse.

MR. HUGHES. Yes, I know I did. I thought it wanted it.

THE PRODUCER. Please try to speak your lines as they are written, Mr. Hughes.

Enter MR. BURBAGE, who plays Macbeth.

MR. BURBAGE. That scene doesn't go. Now don't you think Macbeth had better walk in his sleep instead of Lady Macbeth?

THE STAGE MANAGER. That's an idea.

THE PRODUCER. I think the whole scene might be cut. It's quite unnecessary.

LADY MACBETH. Then I shan't come on in the whole of the fifth act. If that scene's cut I shan't play at all.

THE STAGE MANAGER. We're thinking of trans-

tering the scene to Macbeth. (*To the AUTHOR.*) It wouldn't need much altering. Would you mind rewriting that scene, Mr. Shakespeare? It wouldn't want much alteration. You'd have to change that line about Arabia. Instead of this "little hand," you might say: "All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this horny hand." I'm not sure it isn't more effective.

THE AUTHOR. I'm afraid it might get a laugh.

MR. BURBAGE. Not if I play it.

THE AUTHOR. I think it's more likely that Lady Macbeth would walk in her sleep, but——

MR. BURBAGE. That doesn't signify. I can make a great hit in that scene.

LADY MACBETH. If you take that scene from me, I shan't play Juliet to-night.

THE STAGE MANAGER (*aside to PRODUCER*). We can't possibly get another Juliet.

THE PRODUCER. On the whole, I think we must leave the scene as it is.

MR. BURBAGE. I've got nothing to do in the last act. What's the use of my coming to rehearsal when there's nothing for me to rehearse?

THE PRODUCER. Very well, Mr. Burbage. We'll go on to the Third Scene at once. We'll go through your scene again later, Mr. Hughes.

MR. BURBAGE. Before we do this scene there's a point I wish to settle. In Scene V, when Seyton tells me the Queen's dead, I say: "She should have died hereafter; there would have been a time for such a word"; and then the messenger enters. I should like a soliloquy here, about twenty or thirty lines, if possible in rhyme, in any case ending with a tag. I should like it to be about Lady Macbeth.

Macbeth might have something touching to say about their happy domestic life, and the early days of their marriage. He might refer to their courtship. I must have something to make Macbeth sympathetic, otherwise the public won't stand it. He might say his better-half had left him, and then he might refer to her beauty. The speech might begin :

O dearest chuck, it is unkind indeed
To leave me in the midst of my sore need.

Or something of the kind. In any case it ought to rhyme. Could I have that written at once, and then we could rehearse it?

THE PRODUCER. Certainly, certainly, Mr. Burbage. Will you write it yourself, Mr. Shakespeare, or shall we get some one else to do it?

THE AUTHOR. I'll do it myself if some one will read my part.

THE PRODUCER. Let me see; I forget what is your part.

THE STAGE MANAGER. Mr. Shakespeare is playing Seyton. (*Aside.*) We cast him for Duncan, but he wasn't up to it.

THE PRODUCER. Mr. Kydd, will you read Mr. Shakespeare's part?

BANQUO. Certainly.

THE PRODUCER. Please let us have that speech, Mr. Shakespeare, as quickly as possible. (*Aside.*) Don't make it too long. Ten lines at the most.

THE AUTHOR (*aside*). Is it absolutely necessary that it should rhyme?

THE PRODUCER (*aside*). No, of course not; that's Burbage's fad.

[Exit the AUTHOR into the wings.]

MR. BURBAGE. I should like to go through the fight first.

THE PRODUCER. Very well, Mr. Burbage.

THE STAGE MANAGER. Macduff—Mr. Foote—

MACDUFF. I'm here.

MR. BURBAGE. I'll give you the cue :

"Why should I play the fool and like a Roman
Die on my sword, while there is life, there's hope;
The gashes are for them."

MACDUFF. "Turn, hell-hound, turn."

MR. BURBAGE. I don't think Macduff ought to call Macbeth a hell-hound.

THE PRODUCER. What do you suggest?

MR. BURBAGE. I should suggest: "False Monarch, turn." It's more dignified.

MACDUFF. I would rather say "hell-hound."

THE PRODUCER. Supposing we make it "King of Hell."

MR. BURBAGE. I don't think that would do

THE PRODUCER. Then we must leave it for the present.

MACDUFF. "Turn, hell-hound, turn."

[*They begin to fight with wooden swords.*]

THE STAGE MANAGER. You don't begin to fight till Macduff says "Give thee out."

MR. BURBAGE. I think we might run those two speeches into one, and I might say :

"Of all men I would have avoided thee,
But come on now, although my soul is charged
With blood of thine, I'll have no further words.
My voice is in my sword."

Then Macduff could say :

"O bloodier villain than terms can well express."

THE PRODUCER. We must consult the author about that.

MR. BURBAGE. We'll do the fencing without words first.

[*They begin to fight again. MACDUFF gives MR. BURBAGE a tremendous blow on the shoulder.*]

MR. BURBAGE. Oh! oh! That's my rheumatic shoulder. Please be a little more careful, Mr. Foote. You know I've got no padding. I can't go on rehearsing now. I am very seriously hurt indeed.

MACDUFF. I'm sure I'm very sorry. It was entirely an accident.

MR. BURBAGE. I'm afraid I must go home. I don't feel up to it.

THE STAGE MANAGER. I'll send for some ointment. Please be more careful, Mr. Foote. Couldn't you possibly see your way to take Scene III, Mr. Burbage?

MR. BURBAGE. I know Scene III backwards. However, I'll just run through my speech.

THE STAGE MANAGER. What? "This push will cheer me ever"?

MR. BURBAGE (*peevishly*). No, not that one. You know that's all right. That tricky speech about medicine. Give me the cue.

THE STAGE MANAGER. "That keep her from her rest."

MR. BURBAGE. "Cure her of that:

Canst thou not minister to a sickly mind,

Pull from the memory a booted sorrow,

Rub out the troubles of the busy brain,

And with a sweet and soothing antidote

Clean the stiff bosom of that dangerous poison

Which weighs upon the heart?"

There, you see, word-perfect. What did I say?

THE STAGE MANAGER. Yes, yes, Mr. Burbage. Here's Mr. Shakespeare.

THE AUTHOR. I've written that speech. Shall I read it?

THE PRODUCER. Please.

MR. SHAKESPEARE (*reads*). "To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more; it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing."

MR. BURBAGE. Well, you don't expect me to say that, I suppose. It's a third too short. There's not a single rhyme in it. It's got nothing to do with the situation, and it's an insult to the stage. "Struts and frets" indeed! I see there's nothing left for me but to throw up the part. You can get any one you please to play Macbeth. One thing is quite certain, I won't. [*Exit MR. BURBAGE in a passion.*]

THE STAGE MANAGER (*to the AUTHOR*). Now you've done it.

THE AUTHOR (*to the PRODUCER*). You said it needn't rhyme.

THE PRODUCER. It's Macduff. It was all your fault, Mr. Foote.

LADY MACBETH. Am I to wear a fair wig or a dark wig?

THE PRODUCER. Oh! I don't know.

THE AUTHOR. Dark, if you please. People are

always saying I'm making portraits. So, if you're dark, nobody can say I meant the character for the Queen or for Mistress Mary Fytton.

THE STAGE MANAGER. It's no good going on now. It's all up—it's all up.

CURTAIN.

XIX

KING ALFRED AND THE NEAT-HERD

SCENE.—*Interior of a NEAT-HERD'S hut, near the river Parret, in Somersetshire.*

Enter a NEAT-HERD, followed by KING ALFRED, who is miserably clad and shivering from cold ; he carries a bow and a few broken arrows. A log fire is burning smokily in a corner of the hut.

THE NEAT-HERD (*scratching the back of his head*).
Reckon t' old 'ooman 'ull be baack zoon.

THE KING. We are very hungry.

THE NEAT-HERD. Reckon t' old 'ooman 'ull be baack zoon. She be a baaking.

[*The KING sits down by the fire and warms himself. Enter the NEAT-HERD'S WIFE with much noise and bustle ; she carries a batch of newly-kneaded loaves on a tray, which she puts down in front of the fire. The NEAT-HERD says something to her in an undertone ; she mutters something in answer about "strange folk." Then she goes up to the KING.*

THE NEAT-HERD'S WIFE. If ye be a-staying here ye must make yournself useful.

THE KING (*rising and bowing politely*). We should be delighted to do anything in our power.

THE NEAT-HERD'S WIFE (*looking at the KING with distrust, and talking very quickly*). I'ze warrant ye be strange in these parts. (*To her husband*) I reckon we've no time to see after strange folk. We all be hungry, and it's a mercy we've still got a morsel of bread in the house to keep the children from ztark ztarving, and that's zo. But if he'll look to t' baatch whiles I zee to t' cows, maybe ee'll get a morsel for his pains. (*To the KING*) Now do ee be zure, stranger, ye turn the baatch when they're done a one side.

THE KING (*who has only partially understood what she has said*). We shall be delighted. (*He bows.*)

THE NEAT-HERD'S WIFE (*to her husband*). I reckon he do be daaft.

THE NEAT-HERD. He's no daaft; he be strange.

THE NEAT-HERD'S WIFE. See ee turn the baatch.

THE NEAT-HERD. Oo! AR!

[*The NEAT-HERD'S WIFE goes out and slams the door.*]

[*The KING sits again by the fire and begins to mend his broken arrows; after a pause:*]

THE KING. Do you care for verse?—poetry?

[*The NEAT-HERD scratches the back of his head, and after reflecting for some time:*]

THE NEAT-HERD. Oo! AR!

THE KING. Then we will repeat to you a few little things—mere trifles—we composed in the marshes during our leisure hours. (*He looks pensively upwards.*)

There are clouds in the sky,
 I'm afraid it will rain.
 I cannot think why
 There are clouds in the sky.
 Had I wings, I would fly
 To the deserts of Spain.
 There are clouds in the sky,
 I'm afraid it will rain.

THE KING. That is a triolet.

THE NEAT-HERD. Oo! AR!

THE KING. Here is another. It was written in dejection.

I've had nothing to eat
 For nearly two days.
 It's beginning to sleet,
 I've had nothing to eat;
 Neither oatmeal nor wheat,
 Nor millet nor maize.
 I've had nothing to eat
 For nearly two days.

That is also a triolet—perhaps not quite so successful. (*He looks at the NEAT-HERD inquiringly.*)

THE NEAT-HERD. Oo! AR!

THE KING. We will now repeat to you a sonnet. It is adapted from Boethius. It is called "Suspiria."

[He passes his hand through his hair and looks upward towards the right.]

I used to sit upon an ivory chair,
 And wear a jewelled crown upon my head;
 Fine linen draped in folds my carven bed,
 With myrrh I used to smooth and scent my hair.

I used to play upon a golden harp,
 And every one agreed I played it well;
 The servants bounded when I rang the bell;
 I used to feed on immemorial carp.

But now I wander in a pathless fen,
 Unkinged, forsook, discredited, discrowned;
 I who was born to be the King of Men,
 I who made armies tremble when I frowned,

I—in a neat-herd's damp and draughty hut—
 Perform the menial duties of a slut.

Do you think the last rhyme weak? (*The NEAT-HERD does not answer.*) We have also written a ballad, but we cannot remember all of it. It is addressed to Guthrum, King of the Danes. The *Envoi*, however, runs like this.

Prince, you are having the time of your life,
 From the Straits of Dover to Glaston Tor,
 And writing it home to your Danish wife;—
 But where are the bones and the hammer of Thor?

If we had a harp with us we would sing you the music, but we are sorry to say we lost it in the marsh yesterday.

THE NEAT-HERD. Oo! AR!

Enter the NEAT-HERD'S WIFE

THE NEAT-HERD'S WIFE. Be the baatch ready?

THE KING. Oh yes, of course. We shall be delighted.

[*He hurriedly lifts the tray with the loaves from the hearth and places it on the table.*]

THE NEAT-HERD'S WIFE. Drat th' man! If they bain't all burnt! Ye take strange folk to

house, and aask un to mind the baatch and turn't, and draat un if they doan't forget to turn when they be burning. Ize warrant ye be ready enough to eat un when they be done! Drat the man if I haven't half a mind to give un a beating with th' rolling-pin! Not a morsel shall ee get; good-for-nothing, idle, vagabond, wastrel, ramscullion, thief, robber.

THE NEAT-HERD. Easy, old woman, ee be th' *King!*

THE NEAT-HERD'S WIFE. Well, and if that bain't like a man, to let me tongue run on not knowing nothing neither! (*Curtsy'ing.*) I'm zure I beg your Majesty's humble pardon, and I'm zure I knew nothing and meant no harm; and my man be that foolish not to tell a body that the King's self be here, so homelike and all, taking pity on us poor folk. I'm zure as I meant no harm, and I do for to beg your Majesty's pardon, and that I do, an' right humbly.

THE KING. Do not mention it. We assure you it is not of the slightest consequence. It was exceedingly careless of us to burn your loaves—your admirably kneaded loaves. And we most humbly and sincerely apologise. We are, we are afraid, given to these fits, these sudden and unwarrantable fits of absent-mindedness.

THE NEAT-HERD'S WIFE. And me always a-wanting to see a real Dane, too! Only yesterday I zaid t' Mary, "Mary," I do zay, "the Danes be all over the country." "Lord-americy," she zay, "who be they!" "I bain't zet eyes on one on un yet," zay I, "but folks do zay as they be mighty pleasant folk," zav I: and now to have the

King of the Danes himself in my hut. . . . Well, who'd a thought as zuch a thing would coom to me an' mine!

THE NEAT-HERD. Ye be mistaken, ye be. He bain't the Danish King, he be t'other, he that wur th' King of England—bor! Alfred as was——

THE NEAT-HERD'S WIFE. What?

THE NEAT-HERD. Th' King o' England as was till th' Danes coom ower! Alfred they called 'un!

THE NEAT-HERD'S WIFE. He as be driven away, like?

THE NEAT-HERD. Oo! AR!

THE NEAT-HERD'S WIFE (*to the KING*). Oh, you be he, be you? Then ye ought to be ashamed of yoursel', that ye ought, coming into strange folk's houses at this time o' day, and begging for bread; and then when they've pity on ye for your misery, and give ye the chance of turning an honest penny by a piece of work as mony a man'd be glad to get, and any child could ha' done better, forgetting to turn th' loaves and spoiling th' whole baatch; an' ye know well enow I can't baake again this week—not that I mind th' baatch; but I can't have ye here, nohow! Ye'd best be a-going, and that quick! Bor!

THE KING. But cannot you possibly let us remain here until to-morrow? We are in need of shelter for the night.

THE NEAT-HERD. Don't be too 'ard on him, old 'ooman.

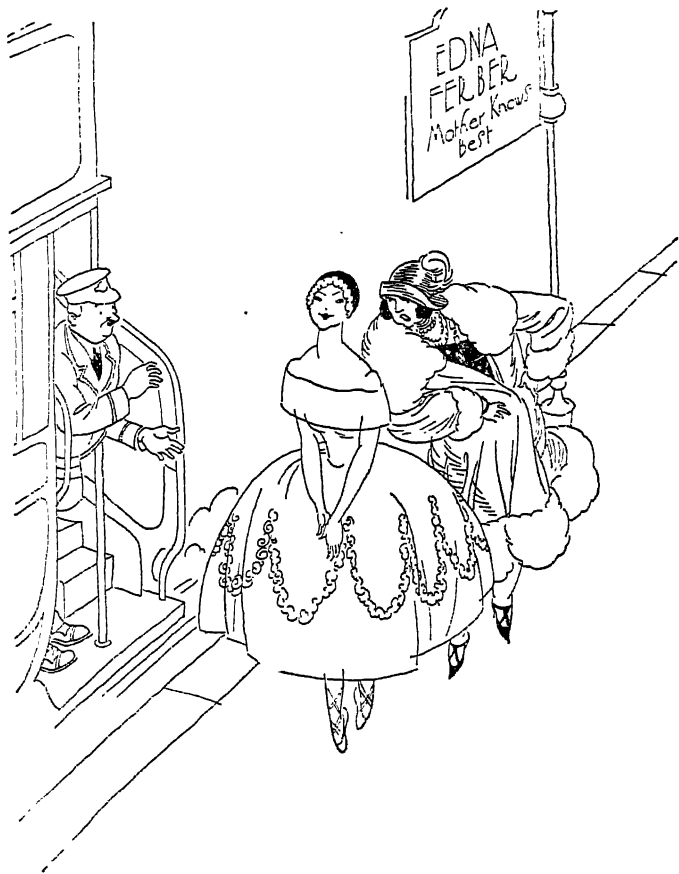
THE NEAT-HERD'S WIFE. Be ye daaft? We'd ha' the Danish soldiers, th' archers, and th' whole Danish army here in no time for a-sheltering a traitor like, and a rubbul. I reckon we're honest

KING ALFRED AND THE NEAT-HERD 155

folk, and loyal servants of the King, and we bain't be going to shelter any gurt rubbul here. I've brought up to be loyal; I've warrant I'm a loyal servant till I do die. No rubbuls here. Out ye go, ye scurvy traitor, and that quick, ye knave, or else I'll bring my rolling-pin to ye! Not that I grudge ye a morsel. There, ye may take one of them burnt cakes with ye, that ye may, and enjoy it, too. And now out with ye, avoor one o' th' neighbours caatch a sight on ye. Out, do ye 'ear me! out!

THE KING (*sighing*). Very well, we are going. (*To himself*) Nothing fails like failure, but perhaps a time will come. (*He goes out peevishly, biting his nails.*)

CURTAIN.



MOTHER KNOWS BEST

A Short Story

from the book of that name

by

EDNA FERBER

Mother Knows Best

THEY say there never was such a funeral in the history of New York's theatrical life. Belasco was there, and of course, Dan Frohman; and though it was an eleven o'clock funeral, even two of the Barrymores got up in time to arrive at the undertaker's chapel just before the casket was carried out. The list of honorary pallbearers sounded like the cast of an all-star benefit at the Century. And as for the flowers! A drop curtain of white orchids; a blanket of lilies of the valley; a pillow of creamy camellias; sheaves of roses; banks of violets. Why, the flowers alone, translated into money, would have supported the Actors' Home for years. Everything was on a similar scale. Satin where others have silk; silver where others have brass; twelve where ordinarily there are six. And her mother, Mrs. Quail ("Ma Quail"—and the term was not one of affection), swathed in expensive mourning which transformed her into a sable pillar of woe, through whose transparencies you somehow got the impression

that she was automatically counting up the house.

In the midst of it all lay Sally Quail, in white chiffon that was a replica of the full floating white chiffon dancing dress that she always wore at the close of her act. A consistent enough costume. Sally was smiling a little; and all those tell-tale lines that she had fought during the past ten years—the tiny lines that, between thirty and forty, etch themselves about a woman's eyes and mouth and forehead—were wiped out magically, completely. What ten years of expert and indefatigable massage has never been able to do, that Mysterious Hand had accomplished in a single gesture. You almost expected her to say, in that thrillingly husky voice of hers, and with the girlish simper that she had adopted when she went on the professional stage at fourteen and still had used—not so happily—at forty:—

“I will now try to give you an imitation of Miss Sally Quail at twenty. Miss . . . Sally . . . Quail . . . at . . . twenty.” And it had then turned out to be an uncanny piece of mimicry, embodying not only facial similarity, but something of the soul and spirit as well. Though in this particular imitation, according to the Scriptures, soul and spirit were supposed to have fled.

Crushed though she was by her sorrow, it had been Ma Quail who had seen to it that this, her talented daughter's last public appearance,

should be, in every detail, as flawless as all her public appearances had been. A born impresario, Ma Quail. During the three days preceding the funeral she had insisted that they come to her for sanction in every arrangement, from motor cars to minister. And she supervised the seating arrangements like a producer on a first night.

"Sally'd have wanted me to," she explained. "She always said Mother knows best."

Of course a lot of people know that Sally Quail's real name was Louisa Schlagel. Not that it matters. Even a name like that couldn't have stopped her climb toward fame. The Schlagels, mother and daughter, had come from Neenah, Wisconsin, propelled rapidly by Mrs. Schlagel. Between Neenah, Wisconsin, and Chicago, Illinois, they had become Mrs. Quail and Sally Quail, respectively. Mrs. Schlagel had read Hall Caine's *The Christian*. Both book and play of that name were enormously in vogue at the time. She had thought the heroine's name a romantic and lovely-sounding thing and had, perhaps almost unconsciously, appropriated its cadences for use in her daughter's stage career. "Glory Quayle . . . Glory Quayle . . . Sally . . . Sally Quayle . . . Sally Quail . . . that's it! Sally Quail. That's short and easy to remember. And you don't run into anybody else with a name like that."

There's no doubt that if it hadn't been for

this tireless general and terrible tyrant, her mother, Sally Quail would have remained Louisa Schlagel, of Neenah, Wisconsin, to the end of her days. Though her natural gifts had evidenced themselves even in her very early childhood, it had been her mother—that driving and relentless force—that had lifted her to fame and fortune. That force of Ma Quail's, in terms of power units—amperes, kilowatts, pounds—would have been sufficient to light a town, run a factory, move an engine. The girl had had plenty of spirit, too, at first. But it had been as nothing compared to the woman's iron quality. If ever a girl owed everything to her mother, that girl was Sally Quail. She said so, frequently. So did Ma Quail.

Sally was forty when she died of typhoid after an illness of but a few days. You were a little startled to learn this. Somehow, you had never thought of her as a mature woman, perhaps because she had never married, perhaps because of her mother's unceasing chaperonage. All her life she was duennaed like a Spanish infanta. Through her mother's tireless efforts Sally Quail had had everything in the world—except two.

In announcing her death the newspaper headlines called her Our Sally. The news was cabled all over the world and was, certainly, as important in London and Paris as it was in New York and Chicago and San Francisco. Hers had been international fame. Hundreds

of thousands of people were conscious of a little pang born of shock and regret when they said, over the morning paper at breakfast:—

“I see that Sally Quail’s dead. Gosh, that’s too bad! She was just a kid. First time I saw her was in—let’s see—no, she couldn’t have been so young, at that. Must have been darned near forty. But an artist, all right. They say she got five thousand a week every time she stepped into vaudeville. . . . Say, look here, this coffee’s stone cold again. Why is it you can’t get a hot cup of coffee in this house!”

When Ma Quail was Mrs. Schlagel she had been the wife of Henry Schlagel, than whom there was nothing in Neenah less important. He was a small druggist of the kind who doesn’t install a soda fountain in his drug store. Even Mrs. Schlagel couldn’t make a success of her husband, Henry, though she had early turned the full battery of her forces upon him; had tried to bully, bribe, cajole, threaten, nag, scold, and weep him into it. She was a fiercely ambitious woman, but there was no moulding Henry. He was fluid, spineless. When you tried to shape him he ran through your fingers. Henry came of better stock than she. Mrs. Schlagel had sprung from a rather common lot living the other side of the tracks. Her marriage with the meek and dusty little apothecary had been, technically, something of a social triumph for the girl. Her father had been a day labourer, her mother a slattern.

The girl, lively, high-spirited, good-looking in a bold dark sort of way, decided to lift herself out of this and did it in ten visits to the fusty little drug store on fictitious errands. The little pharmacist, mixing drugs and grinding powders between mortar and pestle, knew nothing of the mysteries of human chemistry. His marriage was as much a surprise to him as it was to the rest of the town.

The girl, Louisa, was born fully six years after their marriage. By the time she was six years old, the mothers of the neighbourhood knew just where to find their offspring any summer evening after supper. They were certain to be gathered under the corner arc light, with the June bugs blundering and bumping blindly all about and crackling under foot, while Louisa Schlagel recited "Little Orphan Annie" and sang "Jolly Old St. Nicholas" (with gestures), and gave imitations of the crowd's respective papas and mammas with uncanny fidelity. Stern parental voices, summoning children to bed, died away unheard on the soft summer air. Or, if heard:—

"Willie! Clara! Come on now!"

No answer.

"Will Meyers, don't you let me call you again!"

"Well, Pete's sake, wait a minute, can't you. She's in the middle of it."

Sometimes an irate parent would come marching down to the corner bent on violence,

only to be held in thrall.

It was absurd, because she was a plain child, thin, big eyed, sallow. By the time she was twelve she was speaking pieces at the Elks' Club Ladies' Evening and singing and giving imitations at church sociables and K.P. suppers. The little druggist objected to this, prompted by something fine and reticent within him. But his wife was tasting the first fruits of triumph. She had someone to manage, someone to control, someone on whom to turn the currents of her enormous directing energy. By the time Louisa was thirteen her mother was demanding five dollars a performance for her services, and getting it, which was in its way as much of a triumph in that day and place as was the five thousand a week contract, which she consummated in later years. At thirteen the girl was a long-legged gangling creature, all eyes and arms and elbows and (luckily) soft brown curls. She had no singing voice, really, but the vocal organ possessed a certain husky tonal quality that had in it something of power, something of tragedy, much of flexibility. And when she smiled there was something most engaging about her. A frank, boyish sort of grin that took you into her confidence: that said, "Aren't we having a grand time!"

It is difficult to say how her mother recognised the gold mine in her. She induced the manager of the little local vaudeville theatre

to let Louisa go on one Monday night, in an act made up of two songs and three imitations, and one dance that was pretty terrible. It was before the day of the ubiquitous motion picture. The Bijou presented vaudeville of the comic tramp and the Family Four variety. Sandwiched in between these there appeared this tall gawky girl with terrifically long legs and a queer husky voice, and large soft brown eyes staring out from a too-thin face. The travelling men in the audience, hardened by the cruelties of Amateur Nights in vaudeville, began to laugh. But the girl finished her opening song and went into her imitations. She imitated Mansfield, Mabel Hite, and Rose Coghlan, all of whom her mother had taken her to see at the Appleton Wisconsin Opera House, just twenty-five minutes distant by interurban street car. The one-night stand was flourishing then, and the stars of the theatre were not so lofty that they would refuse to twinkle west of Chicago. Well, even the travelling men saw that here was a weird and awkward white-faced child transforming herself miraculously before their eyes into the tragic mask of the buxom Coghlan, or the impish grotesqueries of the clownish Hite or the unusual gift. Something in the sight of this impressive person of Mansfield, moved the beholder to a sort of tearful laughter. Still, it cannot truthfully be said that there was anything spectacular about this, her first appear-

ance on a professional stage. The opinion was that, while the kid was clever, she ought to be home in bed.

That trial served to crystallise into determination the half-formed plan in Mrs. Schlagel's mind. She took the child to Chicago, lied about her age, haunted such booking offices as that city afforded, hounded the vaudeville managers, fought the Gerry society, got a hearing, wrote her husband that she was not coming back—and the career of Sally Quail was started.

To the day she died there was always something virginal and untouched looking about Sally Quail. It was part of her charm. At twenty she looked seventeen. At twenty-nine she looked twenty. At thirty she looked twenty-five. At thirty-five she looked thirty—under that new overhead amber lighting. And then, at thirty-nine, suddenly, she looked thirty-nine. Though she was massaged, and manicured and brushed and creamed and exercised and packed in cotton wool, she took on, in some mysterious way, the appearance of a woman of whom we say that she is well preserved.

For twenty-five years—from fifteen to forty—nothing could prevent Sally's progress, for the way was cleared for her by her mother. That remarkable woman pushed on as relentlessly, as irresistibly as a glacier, sweeping before her every obstruction that stood in her

path. Here was this girl who could sing a little, though she had no voice; dance a little, though she had too long legs; act a little, though her dramatic gift was slight; mimic marvellously. No one ever made more out of little than did Ma Quail. She fought for contracts. She fought for plays. She fought for a better spot always in vaudeville, and even from the first Sally never closed the show. It was years before Sally became a real headliner in vaudeville, with the star's dressing-room and her name in electric lights over the entrance. But her mother surrounded her with all the care, the glamour, the ceremony of stardom. She was tireless, indomitable, unescapable. Press agents featured Sally just to escape her mother. Office boys wilted at her approach. Managers and producers received her with a kind of grim and bitter admiration; recognising this iron woman as one against whom their weapons were powerless.

"Now, look here, Mrs. Quail," they would say, in desperation, "You don't expect me to go to work and star a girl that hasn't got the stuff for it." Then, in anticipation of what was coming, from the look in Ma Quail's face, "Now, wait a minute! Wait a min-ute! I don't say she won't after a while. Give her time. She's only a kid. Wait till she has a little experience She'll grow. Pro'ly be a great artist some day. She's a great little kid, that kid of yours. Only——"

Though it was, perhaps, old Kiper himself speaking, here he floundered, hesitated, stopped. Ma Quail's steely glance ran him through. "Only what?"

A heartening champ at his unlighted cigar. "Well—uh—how old is Sally now? Between us, you know. I mean—how old is the kid?"

"Nineteen."

"Hm. Twenty-one, huh. Ever been in love?"

Ma Quail bridled. "Sally has always had a great deal of attention, and the boys all——"

"Ye-e-e-s, I know. I know. Has she ever been in love?"

Mrs. Quail pursed up her lips, bridled, tossed her head. "Sally is as unspoiled as a child, and as pure as one, too. She's never even been kissed. She——"

Ben Kiper brought one fat fist down on the mahogany of his office desk. "Yeh, and why! No fellah's going to kiss a girl when her mother's holding her hand. Now, wait a minute. Don't get huffy. I'm telling you something for your own good, and nobody knows better than Ben Kiper, that when he does that he loses a friend every time. But I'm going to tell you, just the same. You've been a wonderful mother to that kid, but if you're smart you'll let her alone now. Let her paddle her own canoe a little. Give her a chance. What if she does run on the rocks a little, and bump her nose and stub her toe——"

He was getting mixed in his metaphor, but his sincerity was undeniable.

"You're crazy," said Ma Quail. "Sally can't get along without me. She's said so a million times, and it's true. She can't get dressed without me, or make up. She can't go on unless I'm standing in the first entrance. She'd be lost without me."

"Yeh. Well." He made a little gesture of finality, of defeat. "All right, Ma. You win. Only, when she leaves you, don't come around and say I didn't warn you."

Ma Quail stood up, her diamond ear-drops flashing with the vigour of her movements. She had started to buy diamonds in Sally's second year of stage success. At first they were rather smoky little diamonds of the kind that cluster around a turquoise for support. But as the years went on you could mark the degree of Sally's progress by the increasing whiteness, brilliance, and size of Ma Quail's gems. She bought them, she said, as an investment. At this moment they were only fair in size, refractive power, and colour. But they took on life from the very energy of their wearer.

"And let me tell you this, Mr. Kiper. When the day comes that you'll offer my Sally twenty-five hundred a week, and she'll turn it down——"

"You'll turn it down, you mean," interrupted Kiper.

"All right. I'll turn it down. But just re-

member the time when you refused to star her for five hundred a week. You can tell the story on yourself if you want to. You're probably just fool enough."

Which is no way for a stage mamma to talk to a powerful and notoriously kind-hearted old theatrical manager. But as it turned out, he was wrong and she was right, in the matter of predictions.

Ben Kiper, seeing that he had hit home, decided he might as well let Ma Quail have both barrels and make an enemy for life. He was interested in Sally's career and fond of the girl. And he was a wise old gargoyle. Ma Quail was fastening her furs, an angry eye on the door. Kiper fixed upon her a look at once patriarchal and satyric—in itself no mean histrionic feat.

"Now, listen, Ma. You know's well as I do that no girl can make a hit in musical comedy unless she's got sex appeal. And how's anybody going to find out whether Sally's got it or not, until you cut loose those apron strings you've got her all tied up with? My God—a stage nun! That's what she is. Let her fall in love and break her heart, and pick up the pieces, and marry, and have a terrible time, maybe; and fight, and make up, and get——"

Ma Quail was at the door. She looked every inch the stage mother. Suddenly her face was darkly stamped and twisted with jealousy and fear. "Sally doesn't want to marry. Sally

doesn't want to marry. She's told me so."

"Yeh?" The old eyes, with the oyster pouches beneath, narrowed as they regarded her. Freud and fixations were not cant words at that time; and certainly old Ben Kiper foresaw nothing of the latter-day psychology. But he knew many of the tortuous paths that twist the human mind; and here he recognised something familiar and ugly. "Yeh? Who put that funny idea in her head? Give her a chance, why don't you?"

"If my Sally ever marries it'll be a prince."

"Prince! Hell! Not if she picks him," yelled old Kiper, just before she slammed the door behind her.

You would have thought that blunt talk like this might have opened her eyes, but such scenes only served to increase Ma Quail's watchfulness, her devotion, her tireless planning.

Sometimes headliners (feminine) used to resent the pomp and ceremony with which Ma Quail would surround this young person, who was only filling third spot on the vaudeville bill. A change of costume in the wings. A velvet curtain hung there for protection. A square of white sheeting on the floor before the emergency dressing-table so that the hem of her gown should not be sullied, a wicker clothes basket, chastely covered with snowy white, holding her quick change—gown, slippers, make-up. A special pan of special resin in which to rub the

soles of her satin slippers before she went into her dance.

"Listen! Who's headliner on this bill—me or Quail?" they would demand of the house manager.

Mother and daughter went to the theatre together. Ma Quail stood in the wings throughout the time that Sally was on stage; dressed her; undressed her; made her up; criticised her; took her home. Put her to bed. She brought her her breakfast in the morning. They ate their early dinner together; their bite of late supper. Sally was an amiable and generous girl, and devoted to her mother. But there were times when she was unaccountably irritable, restless, impatient. Ma Quail put this down to temperament and was rather pleased than otherwise.

Sally's big chance in musical comedy (*Miss Me* ran two solid years in New York) did not come until she was twenty-four. Before she was starred in that success she had won solid recognition in vaudeville, and in musical comedy rôles that were not stellar. And always, just ahead of her, her mother, inserting a wedge here, getting a toe in there, widening the opening that led to stardom.

It was when Sally was playing the old Olympic Theatre in Chicago that Ma Quail fell ill, and was forced to take to her bed. It was influenza, of which there was a particularly violent epidemic at the time. It was elegantly

termed "la grippe"; or, as Mrs. Quail explained, "a touch of the la grippe." She literally had never been ill, and thought that, by treating this illness with contempt, she could vanquish it. For one afternoon and one evening performance she stuck it out, appearing sunken-eyed and putty-faced at the theatre, there to stand alternately shivering and burning in the wings until finally they forced her to go back to her hotel (they were stopping at the old Sherman House) and to bed, where she just escaped pneumonia. They got a nurse, though Ma Quail fought this.

Sick as she was, and even a bit delirious the first twenty-four hours, she still ruled Sally from her bed. Sally was playing down on the bill, which meant a good spot toward the end of the programme in the second half. Ma Quail fumed until Sally was off to the theatre; tossed and turned and muttered during her absence; began to listen for her return a full hour before the girl could possibly have finished her act. She thrashed about on her pillows, sat up, threatened to get out of bed, quarrelled chronically with her long-suffering nurse, was as impatient and difficult as a sick man.

"Now she's putting on her make-up. She never gets it on right unless I'm there. Chunks her grease paint. . . . Now she's dressing. There was a hook that was working a little loose on her white. It may be off by now, for

all I know. I should have caught it when I noticed it, but I thought I'd do it next. . . . Now it's almost time to go on. That Nixon is just ahead of her. I told them not to run those two acts next to each other. Not that that cheap hooper's act is anything like my Sally's. But she ought to follow a sketch. If I was up I'd make them shift the bill. . . . Now she's on. . . ." She would hum a little tune, her eyes bright and heavy with fever, a dull glow in her sallow cheeks, her hair twisted into a careless knot on top of her aching head. . . . "That's right. That's right. Go on. . . . Now she's off. There's her bow music. She's taking her curtains. One . . . two . . . three . . . four—she could have had another if they'd taken the curtain up again. . . . She'll be home now in half an hour. . . . twenty minutes . . . fifteen . . . ten. . . . What time is it, Miss Burke?"

The long-suffering Miss Burke would tell her the truth, having tried a professionally soothing lie on her first day with Ma Quail, and having been caught in it, with effect not calculated to allay fever in a case of la grippe.

"Now, Mrs. Quail, you mustn't get yourself all worked up this way. Just see if you can't drop off a minute before Miss Sally gets back. She'll be here before you know it, and then won't you be surprised!"

"Talk like a fool," retorted Ma Quail. "What's keeping her, I wonder."

On the first day of her mother's illness Sally tore off her clothes, only half removed her make up, flew back to the hotel, sat by her mother's bedside against the nurse's warnings and the half-hearted protests of her mother. The second matinée she returned to the hotel directly after her performance, but her haste was, perhaps, a shade less feverish than it had been the night before. On the third night after she had finished dressing, she came out to the first entrance and stood there to watch Nixon doing his act. Nixon was the hooper of whom her mother had spoken with contempt. His act preceded hers. Ma Quail never permitted Sally to stand in the entrance watching the other acts. "Keeping tabs," it was called; or catching the act; and Sally loved to do it, particularly when the act was a dancing act. She loved dancing, especially clog and soft shoe. At both of these Nixon seemed to be expert. Curiously enough, she found three pairs of eyes squinting through the tiny gap in the old red plush curtain that hung before the first entrance. High praise, certainly, for Nixon. Three—and now, with Sally, four—fellow actors on the bill keeping tabs on his act meant that Nixon's act was worth watching.

"New stuff?" whispered Sally to the nearest ear.

"Every time he goes on. Wait a minute. There now. Get that one. He didn't pull that one this afternoon. He makes every other

hooper I ever saw look like they was nailed to the floor."

Sally, standing in the entrance, applied a fascinated eye to an inch of slit in the curtain. Involuntarily the muscles in her long nimble legs ached to do these incredibly difficult feats that seemed so simple to the uninitiate. Nixon did a black-face single. His act was that of a dancing monologist, so that Ma Quail was justified in thinking that he should not have preceded Sally. His monologue was dullish stuff; his dancing nothing short of marvellous. His was perfect muscle control, exact rhythm sense, and an assumption of indolent ease in motion that carried with it a touch of humour. Sally had been on dozens of bills with him; knew him as a shy and quiet young man who called her Miss Sally and crushed himself up against the wall to let her pass; a decent young man; descended from a long line of hoofers; a personable enough young man with a lithe waist, a quick smile, white teeth and a Mid-western accent. Born, he said, in Kansas city, but the world was his address. His costume—to which his black face lent the last touch of the ridiculous—was an exaggeration of the then fashionable male mode, peg-top trousers, wide silk lapels, saw-edged sailor, pointed shoes. In contrast with this grotesquerie he seemed, off-stage, all the more shy and, somehow, engaging and boyish.

As he bounded off now, went on again for his

bows, off, and turned toward the passage that led to his dressing-room, Sally, ready to go on, forgot her own invariable nervousness in her interest at what she had just seen and envied.

"Where did you get that one?" She tried to do it. They were playing her cue music. It was time for her to go on.

"No," grinned Nixon, very earnest and polite behind the black smear that was his make-up. "Go on. You take 'em. I'll show you."

He was waiting for her when she came off—a thing that had never happened to her before. Trust Ma Quail for that.

"But I don't want to steal your stuff," Sally protested.

"Say, I'd be proud to have you even look at it, let alone want to catch it. Leave me show you how it goes."

"Mother's sick."

"Yeh. I heard. Say, that's too bad. How is she?"

"She's better, only she gets nervous if I don't come straight back to the room soon's I'm dressed. But maybe—just five minutes—"

They observed the proprieties by leaving her dressing-room door wide open. "Now look . . . Naw! . . . Naw! . . . Look! One and two and three and slide and *turn* and one and two and three and slide and *turn* and . . . looka what I do with my knee there . . . See?"

Naw! . . . Stiff. . . . That's it! You'll get it. Only you got to practise. I bet I was three months at it, mornings, before I put it in."

You got a mental picture of him, in dancing trunks, in his grubby hotel bedroom, solemnly and earnestly mastering the intricacies of this new step, his stage a carpet that had been worn grey and threadbare by many dancing mirthless feet.

Sally meant to tell her mother the cause of her delay. She didn't dream of not telling her. After all, she had picked up a new dance step. But when she reached her mother's room she found there a woman in such a state of hysteria, brought on by anxiety and general devilment, that she found herself, to her own horror, making up some tale about having had her spot changed—moved down on the bill—a change for the better. She felt stricken at what she had done. Then she realised that she would have to do it again to-morrow—and next day—and the next—and the next. And suddenly a vista—not a wide one, but still a vista—opened out before her mind's eye. An hour to herself every day. Every day—an hour—to herself. She did not say this even to herself. She did not even think she thought it. Something seemed to say it for her. She did not even think of a way to explain her explanation, should her mother recover before the end of the week. But she

wouldn't be able, surely, to come to the theatre before the end of this week's bill. Sally hoped she would, of course—but she wouldn't.

Sally came out of the stage entrance after her afternoon performance that next day and stood a moment on the top step blinking almost dazedly at the dim, slimy, downy Chicago alley. It looked strangely bright to her, that alley; a sort of golden light suffused it. An hour. She had an hour. As she stood there, blinking a little, she was like a prisoner who, released after long years of servitude, stands huddled at the prison gates, fighting the impulse to creep back into the cold embrace of the grey walls that have so long sheltered him. So Sally thought, "Well, I guess I'll go right home."

But she didn't. Instead she began to stroll in a desultory manner down Clark Street, looking in the windows. She was conscious of a sensation of exhilaration, of buoyancy. That sordid thoroughfare, Clark Street, took on a fascination, a sparkle, a brilliance. Sally saw in the window of a candy store a great square pan of freshly dipped dark brown chocolate creams. She went in and bought a little paper sackful. Her mother rarely allowed her to eat sweets. They were bad for her complexion. Sally now strolled on down the street, consuming her plump chocolates by a process as unladylike as it was difficult. You bit off the top of the cone-shaped sweet, or, if

you preferred, you bit a small opening at the side, taking care not to make this too large, and including in this bite as little as possible of the creamy fondant beneath. This accomplished, the trick was to lick at the soft white filling with a little scooping flick of the tongue, much in the manner of a cat consuming a saucer of cream. Little by little, thus, the fondant melts on the tongue, disappears, leaving a hollow shell of chocolate, an empty cocoon. So Sally Quail, in her new freedom, strolled exulting down Clark Street, staring into the windows, stopping before some of them, her little pointed red tongue working busily away at the sweet held in her fingers, her face beatifically blank as the sugary stuff trickled down her grateful throat. There was even a little unsuspected dab of chocolate on one cheek, near her mouth. It gave her a most juvenile and engaging look.

She was thus engaged when Nixon approached her, breathing a trifle rapidly, as though he had been running. She showed, queerly enough, no surprise at seeing him. He fell into step beside her.

"I didn't see you go out. I was getting dressed. You must've jumped into your clothes."

"Blm," said Sally, companionably, her mouth full of fondant; and held the sack out to him, hospitably. He took one, ate it, took another, ate that, suddenly noticed her

method, which she was pursuing calmly and without affectation.

"Say, that's a great system you got, Miss Sally. How'd you like to have one six feet high, and lick your way right through it!"

Sally laughed heartily at this, and so did he, though it wasn't very bright. And so, still giggling they reached the Sherman House. And a little stricken look of contrition came into Sally's face. He said: "Well, so long. See you to-night. Uh—say, there's a little spot of candy on your cheek."

"Where?" And rubbed the wrong place.

"Right—there." He whipped out a handkerchief, put it back hastily, took out another, neatly folded, and held it up, hesitating. "If you don't mind——"

She didn't mind. He rubbed it off, gently. There was something intimate, something protective, about the act.

"See you to-night, Miss Sally."

"See you to-night."

On the way up she gave the remaining chocolates to the elevator boy. And then the usual questions, the usual answers. How many curtains? How much applause? How was the house? Was the headliner still high-hatting her?

The evening show.

Nixon wanted to introduce a song into his act. No, he couldn't sing, he told her. Not what you'd call sing. But you know. One

of those coon songs. Kind of fresh up the act. He asked her advice about it. He hung on her answer. Her decision. Sally Quail, for whom everything was decided. Sally Quail, who never was allowed to do anything for anyone. Everything done for her. No one allowed her to do for them. Not her capable martinet mother, surely. It was sweet to have someone dependent on you for their decisions; someone who you thought your advice valuable—not valuable only, but invaluable. She was riding straight for catastrophe, was Sally Quail, without ever being warned of the road.

They watched each other's act, matinée and evening. She was there just the moment before he went on—that moment when the vaudeville actor "sets himself" for his entrance. She had seen them do all sorts of things for luck to last them through the concentrated fifteen minutes of an act. She had seen them cross themselves. She had seen them rub a tiny talisman. She had seen them mutter a prayer. Nixon, sprung from a long line of acrobats, black-face minstrels, hoofers, always went through a little series of meaningless motions before the final second that marked his entrance music. There was a little preliminary cough, a shuffle, a backward glance over his shoulder at nothing, a straightening of the absurd hat, tie, coat; a jerk at the coat lapel, a hunch of the shoulders, a setting

of his features—all affording relief for strained nerves. Click! He was on, walking with that little exaggeration of the Negro shuffle, his arms hanging limp and loose and long, his eyes rolling tragically. He had rehearsed his new song and now he tried it out at the close of his act. It was one of those new coon songs and was called "I Guess I'll Have To Telephone My Baby." It was the type of plaintive comic that preceded the Jazz Blues of to-day. He had, really, no more of a singing voice than Sally had. But he had a plaintive tonal quality, and a melodious resonance that caught and held you. He got two extra curtains on it, thus cutting in on Sally's act time. She did not resent this, though when he came off he apologised with something resembling tears in his eyes.

"Why, say, I didn't go for to crab your act, Miss Sally. Why, say, I wouldn't have done that for the world. Why, say—" He was incoherent, agonised.

Sally, set to go on, looked up at him. No girl of experience would have shown unconsciously the look that Sally turned upon him. Certainly her mother had never seen that look in her eyes. Her face was sparkling, animated, glowing. Dimples flashed where dimples had not been. In that look you saw pride in the achievement of someone else—someone for whom she cared. She even said it.

"Don't be silly! I'm proud of you. Glad you stopped the show." And went on.

If Ma Quail had been there it would have taken the house manager, the stage hands, firemen, ushers, and doorman to hold her.

Ma Quail, in her hotel bedroom, had impatiently endured five days away from the theatre; five days without seeing her Sally go on; five days of domination by a nurse. The nurse, left, always, at eight. This evening as Ma Quail lay there, fuming, she was racked by a feeling of unrest, of danger to Sally. She had had that feeling before, and nothing had come of it. It was due, of course, to her unwholesome absorption in the girl, though she would not have admitted this even if she had recognised it as being true. The feeling grew, took complete possession of her. Sally was in the theatre. Sally was dressing; Sally would soon be going on. She could endure it no longer. Trembling and dizzy with the peculiar weakness that even a brief siege of this particular illness leaves, she dressed shakily, catching at chairs and tables for support. She took a carriage to convey her the short distance to the Olympic. Sick and shivering as she was, she actually seemed to take on a new strength and vigour as she passed the stage doorkeeper. She sniffed the theatre smell sensitively, gratefully. For years it had been incense in her nostrils. Sally would be almost ready to go on, now that her

act had been shifted to a spot down on the bill. She actually resented this advantage having come to Sally without her mother having fought for it. Up the winding iron stairway; down the narrow dim hall; a smile of anticipation on her face. She turned the knob of Sally's dressing-room door; she opened the door softly, softly, so as to surprise her Sally.

Sally Quail, with her head thrown back, was looking into the eyes of Jimmy Nixon, of the Dancing Nixons. Nixon's arms were close about her. Sally's eyes were half closed. Her chin was lifted with shy upward eagerness. Her mouth was tremulous and ripe and flexible—the lips of a woman who knows that she is about to be kissed. It was a kiss she never received.

"I love you, Sally," said Nixon.

And, "Oh, I love you, too," said Sally Quail. Her voice was a breath, a whisper.

There was something terrible, something indecent about Ma Quail's ruthless tearing apart of these two young things. She did it so horribly, so brutally. Her jewel was being stolen. The flower that she had tended and nurtured was being plucked by clumsy alien hands. Ugly words bubbled to her lips and broke there.

"Get out of here!" She slammed the door, advanced menacingly. She actually seemed about to strike him. "Get out of here you—

you cheap hoofer, you! Get out or I'll have you thrown out!" She turned to the girl. "You fool! You little fool!"

Nixon unclasped the girl, but he still held her hand in his. As always, under emotion, he spoke the slow and drawling tongue of the born Kansan.

"You can't talk that way to us, ma'am."

Sally said nothing. Her face was white and drawn and old. The sight of it whipped Ma Quail into fresh fury.

"Can't!" she spat out in a whisper that had all the vehemence of a scream. "I'll can't you! Get out of here, you bum, you! I'll have you thrown out of the circuit. I'll fix it so you'll never show in any decent house again. I'll—" unconsciously she used a term she had heard somewhere in cheap melodrama—"I'll break you!"

He grinned at that. He took a step toward her, drawing the frightened girl with him. "Come on, Sally," he said quietly. "Come on away out of here."

"I'm afraid," whispered Sally. "I'm afraid. Where?"

"You know," he said. "What we were talking about. Nixon and Quail."

But at that, of course, Ma Quail fainted for the first time in her life. And when she had been revived she insisted that she was dying, and Nixon had been sent out of the room, and they took off her stays, and rubbed her hands

and gave her whisky, and she rolled her eyes, and groaned, and made Sally promise, over and over, that she would never see Nixon again. It was her dying wish. She was dying. Sally had killed her. And of course Sally promised, racked by self-reproach. And that was the end of that, and, everyone will admit, a good thing for Sally.

Ma Quail prevailed on the management to retain Sally's act for another week, which broke up contact with Nixon in the next week's bill, scheduled for Milwaukee.

Sally probably forgot all about it in later years. Curiously enough, she never would talk about it, even to her mother. And though the prince her mother was expecting never came, practically everything else in life did. Fame, and fortune, and popularity, and friendship. A house in London, a house in New York, an apartment in Paris. Private trains. Perhaps no woman of the theatre ever made (honestly) such fantastic sums as Sally Quail earned yearly for twenty years. Under her indomitable mother's shrewd management she became polished, finished, exquisite in her art, though she managed, somehow, miraculously, to retain something of her girlishness and simplicity and loveliness to the end. Still, sometimes if you glimpsed the two driving on Fifth Avenue or in the Bois, you wondered about Sally. You saw them driving in one of these long low foreign cars

that are almost all engine. One of those cars that proclaim the fact that its owner has at least two others. You know. It had a hood over the back, but no hood in the front, so that the chauffeur and a good half of the delicate upholstery were unprotected. It was a proud and insolent car that said, "I am a bibelot. I am a luxury. I am practically no good at all except when the sun is shining—but not shining too hotly. When it is fair, but not too cool. I am only to be used at special times by special people. I am the specialist kind of car for people who don't have to care a damn. I am money. Look about you. You won't see many like me."

Sally looked none too glowingly happy in the hooded depths of this gorgeous vehicle, a luxurious fur rug tucked about her gifted knees, a toy dog sticking his tongue out at passers-by in lesser cars.

Sally Quail's tragic and untimely death broke her mother completely—or almost completely. Small wonder. Still, she derived a crumb of comfort from the touching and heart-breaking last moment that preceded Sally's going. In the midst of the fever that consumed her she had what seemed to be a lucid last moment just before the end. Ma Quail told of it, often and often, over and over, to sympathetic friends.

For at the end, as she lay there, looking, in her terrible illness, much much more than her

forty years, suddenly her face had assumed the strangest look—the look of a girl of twenty. There was about it a delicacy, a glow. She sat up in bed as though she were strong and well again. All the little lines in her face were wiped out queerly, completely, as though by a magic hand. She lifted her chin a little with a shy upward eagerness and her fever-dried lips took on the tremulousness and the flexibility of the lips of a woman who knows that she is about to be kissed. Her arms were outstretched, her eyes fixed on something that she found wonderful and beautiful.

“Sally!” Ma Quail had screamed. “Sally! What is it! What is it! Oh, my God! Look at me. Mother! It’s Mother! Mother loves you!”

And, “Oh, I love you too!” said Sally Quail. Her voice was a breath; a whisper.



HOW THEY WOULD HAVE DONE IT

Four of the
COLLECTED PARODIES
of
J. C. SQUIRE

HOW THEY WOULD HAVE DONE IT

IF SWINBURNE HAD WRITTEN "THE LAY OF HORATIUS"

*N.B.—Read this aloud, with resonance, nor examine
too closely the meaning.*

May the sword burn bright, may the old sword smite,
that a myriad years have worn and rusted?

May an old wind blow where the young winds go
immaculate over the eager land?

May faded blossoms on ripening bosoms flame with lust
as of old they lusted,

Or the might of a night take flight with the white
sweet arms of a dead Dionysian band?

Ah, nay! for the rods of the high pale gods the power
of the past have spilled and broken

And over the fields the amaranth yields her guerdon
of gossamer, bitter as rue,

And the desolate blind sad ghost of the wind falters
and fails as a word that was spoken

Long since of a fire and a blazing pyre of perjured
monarchs and kings untrue.*

The sword may smite and the keen sword bite though
the clouds in the sky be clouds of peril,

Though the Teuton glance at the flanks of France
and the hand of Fate be a hand unseen,

For the brave man's† arm was swift to charm and the
coward's arm was weak and sterile

* Possible mention of Tarquin.

† Conceivably Horatius.

COLLECTED PARODIES

Or ever the Saxon galleons swam to England* over
the waters green
And over the high Thessalian hills the feet of the
maidens fail and falter,
Samian waters and Lemnian valleys, Ithacan rivers
and Lesbian seas,
And the god returning with frenzy burning foams at
the foot of a roseless altar,
And dumb with the kiss of Artemis and the berries
of death the virgin flees.

*With persistence and luck the reader, after eighty
verses or so, would have come to something as
specific as this:*

For the triumph of the trampling of the nations
And the laughter of the loud Etrurian† gates
And the thunder of a host of desolations
And the lightning of an avalanche of hates
Never daunted thee or made thy cheek the paler
On the bridge which thou didst hold as held the fleet
Drake, our own superb Elizabethan sailor,
Yea, and drove the bloody tyrant from his seat.

* Our mother, inviolate ever since, save for one only occasion.

† Lars Porsena in poet's mind.

HOW THEY WOULD HAVE DONE IT

IF MR. MASEFIELD HAD WRITTEN "CASABIANCA"

"You dirty hog," "You snouty snipe,"
"You lump of muck," "You bag of tripe,"
Such, as their latest breaths they drew,
The objurgations of the crew.

— — — they roared
As they went tumbling overboard,
Or frizzled like so many suppers
All along the halyard scuppers.
"You ——" . . . the last was gone,
And Cassy yelled there all alone.
(He thought the old man was on the ship.)
"Father! this gives me the fair pip!"

"My God, you old vagabond," he cried,
"If only I . . ." No voice replied;
Only the tall flames higher sprang,
Amid the spars, and soared and sang,
Only along the rigging came
God's great unfolding flower of flame,
And Love's divine dim planet shed
Her radiance on the many dead;
And past the battling fleets the sea
Stretched to the world's edge tranquilly,
Breathing with slow, contented breath
As though it were in love with Death,
As it has breathed since first began
Man's inhumanity to man,

COLLECTED PARODIES

As it will do when like a scroll
All the heavens together roll.
There's that purple passage done
And I have one less lap to run.

Dogs barked, owls hooted, cockerels crew,
As in my works they often do
When, flagging with my main design,
I pad with a descriptive line.
Young Cassy cried again: "Oh, damn!
What an unhappy put I am!
Will nobody go out and search
For dad, who's left me in the lurch?
For dad, who's left me on the poop,
For dad, who's left me in the soup,
For dad, who's left me on the deck.
Perhaps it's what I should expect
Considerin' 'ow he treated me
Before I came away to sea.

"Often at home he used to beat
My head for talking in the street.
Often for things I didden do,
He brushed my breeches with a shoe.
O! but I wish that I was home now,
Treading the soft old Breton foam now
In that old Breton country where
Mellows the golden autumn air,
And all the tender champaign fills
With hyacinths and daffodils,
And on God's azure uplands now
They plough the ploughed fields with a plough,
And earth-worms feel averse from laughter,

HOW THEY WOULD HAVE DONE IT

With hungry white birds following after.
And maids at evening walk with men
Through the meadows and up the glen
To hear the old sweet tale again."
The deck was getting hot and hotter,
"Father!" he screamed, "you —— rotter!"
The deck was getting red and redder,
And now he thought he'd take a header,
Now he advanced and now he faked it . . .
It had been better had he barked it,
For as he wavered thus, and swore,
There came a slow tremendous roar.
Lord Nelson suddenly woke up.
"Where is Old Cassy and his pup?
'Don't know,' you say? Why, strike me blind,
I s'pose I'd better ask the wind."
He asked the wind; the brooding sky
At once gave back the wind's reply:
"Wot to, Nelson!"

"Wot to, sonny!"

"Do you think you're being funny?
Can't you look around, confound you,
At all these fragments that surround you,
Thick as thieves upon the sea,
Instead of coming bothering me?"

*Or, alternatively, if you prefer his other method, it
would run like this:*

And the flames rose, and leaping flames of fire
Leapt round the masts and made the spars a crown,
A golden crown, as ravenous as desire.

COLLECTED PARODIES

"Father!" he cried, "my feet are getting brown."
"Father!" he cried. The quiet stars looked down,
The flames rose up like flowers overhead.
He was alone and all the crew were dead.

HOW THEY WOULD HAVE DONE IT.

IF GRAY HAD HAD TO WRITE HIS ELEGY IN
THE CEMETERY OF SPOON RIVER INSTEAD
OF IN THAT OF STOKE POGES.

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
The whippoorwill salutes the rising moon,
And wanly glimmer in her gentle ray,
The sinuous windings of the turbid Spoon.

Here where the flattering and mendacious swarm
Of lying epitaphs their secrets keep,
At last incapable of further harm
The lewd forefathers of the village sleep.

The earliest drug of half-awakened morn,
Cocaine or hashish, strychnine, poppy seeds
Or fiery produce of fermented corn
No more shall start them on the day's misdeeds.

For them no more the whetstone's cheerful noise,
No more the sun upon his daily course
Shall watch them savouring the genial joys,
Of murder, bigamy, arson and divorce.

Here they all lie; and, as the hour is late,
O stranger, o'er their tombstones cease to stoop,
But bow thine ear to me and contemplate
The unexpurgated annals of the group.

COLLECTED PARODIES

There are two hundred only: yet of these
Some thirty died of drowning in the river,
Sixteen went mad, ten others had D.T's.
And twenty-eight cirrhosis of the liver.

Several by absent-minded friends were shot,
Still more blew out their own exhausted brains,
One died of a mysterious inward rot,
Three fell of roofs, and five were hit by trains.

One was harpooned, one gored by a bull-moose,
Four on the Fourth fell victims to lock-jaw,
Ten in electric chair or hempen noose,
Suffered the last exaction of the law.

Stranger, you quail, and seem inclined to run;
But, timid stranger, do not be unnerved,
I can assure you that there was not one
Who got a tithe of what he had deserved.

Full many a vice is born to thrive unseen,
Full many a crime the world does not discuss,
Full many a pervert lives to reach a green
Replete old age, and so it was with us.

Here lies a parson who would often make
Clandestine rendezvous with Claflin's Moll,
And neath the druggist's counter creep to take
A sip of surreptitious alcohol.

HOW THEY WOULD HAVE DONE IT.

And here a doctor who had seven wives,
And, fearing this *ménage* might seem grotesque,
Persuaded six of them to spend their lives
Locked in a drawer of his private desk.

And others here there sleep who, given scope,
Had writ their names large on the Scrolls of Crime,
Men who, with half a chance, might haply cope
With the first miscreants of recorded time.

Doubtless in this neglected spot is laid
Some village Nero who has missed his due,
Some Bluebeard who dissected many a maid
And all for naught, since no one ever knew.

Some poor bucolic Borgia here may rest
Whose poisons sent whole families to their doom,
Some hayseed Herod who, within his breast,
Concealed the sites of many an infant's tomb.

Types that the Muse of Masefield might have stirred
Or waked to ecstasy Gaboriau,
Each in his narrow cell at last interred,
All, all are sleeping peacefully below.

.

Enough, enough! But, stranger, ere we part.
Glancing farewell to each nefarious bier,
This warning I would beg you take to heart,
"There is an end to even the worst career!"

COLLECTED PARODIES

IF SIR RABINDRANATH TAGORE HAD WRITTEN "LITTLE DROPS OF WATER "

Child, I am wondering.

Last night I was watching the silver moon rising
over the sea,

And in her light the colour of the sea was pale, and
the colour of the grasses was dark and sweet as
the champak.

I heard the ducks crying over the waters by the shore.
I heard from the khitmatgar, threading like pearls
on the darkness, the soft notes of the cummer-
bund.

Child, I am wondering.

Child, I smelt the flowers.

The golden flowers . . . hiding in crowds like
fairies at my feet,

And as I smelt them the endless smile of the infinite
broke over me, and I knew that they and you
and I were one.

They and you and I, the cowherds and the cows,
the jewels and the potter's wheel, the mothers
and the light in baby's eyes.

For the sempstress when she takes one stitch may
make nine unnecessary;

And the smooth and shining stone that rolls and
rolls like the great river may gain no moss,

And it is extraordinary what a lot you can do with a
platitude when you dress it up in Blank Prose.

Child, I smelt the flowers.



AUGUSTUS CARP, Esq.

by

HIMSELF

CHAPTER I

No apology for writing this book. An imperative duty under present conditions. Description of my parents and their personal appearances. Description of Mon Repos, Angela Gardens. Long anxiety prior to my birth. Intense joy when at last this takes place. My father's decision as to my Xtian name. Early selection of my first godfather.

It is customary, I have noticed, in publishing an autobiography to preface it with some sort of apology. But there are times, and surely the present is one of them, when to do so is manifestly unnecessary. In an age when every standard of decent conduct has either been torn down or is threatened with destruction; when every newspaper is daily reporting scenes of violence, divorce, and arson; when quite young girls smoke cigarettes and even, I am assured, sometimes cigars; when mature women, the mothers of unhappy children, enter the sea in one-piece bathing-costumes; and when married men, the heads of households, prefer the flicker of the cinematograph to the Athanasian Creed—then it is obviously a task, not to be justifiably avoided, to place some higher example before the world.

For some time—I am now forty-seven—I had been feeling this with increasing urgency. And when not only my wife and her four sisters, but the vicar of my parish, the Reverend Simeon Whey, approached me with the same suggestion, I felt that delay would amount to sin. That sin, by many persons, is now lightly regarded, I am, of course, only too well aware. That its very existence is denied by others is a fact equally familiar to me. But I am not one of them. On every ground I am an unflinching opponent of sin. I have continually rebuked it in others. I have strictly refrained from it in myself. And for that reason alone I have deemed it incumbent upon me to issue this volume.

I propose in the first instance to deal with my earliest surroundings and the influence exerted upon me by my father. Believing as I do that every man (and to a lesser extent every woman) is almost entirely the product of his or her personal endeavours. I cannot pretend, of course, to attach much importance to merely paternal influence. Nevertheless in the lives of each one of us it undoubtedly plays a certain part. And although my father had numerous faults, as I afterwards discovered and was able to point out to him, he yet brought to bear on me the full force of a frequently noble character.

That such was his duty I do not of course deny. But duty well done is rare enough to deserve a tribute. And in days such as these, when fatherhood is so lightly regarded, and is so frequently, indeed, accidental, too much attention can surely not be given to so opposite an instance.

At the time of my birth, then, and until his death, my father was a civic official in a responsible position, being a collector of outstanding accounts for the Consolidated Water Board. In addition, he was one of the most respected and trustworthy agents of the Durham and West Hartlepool Fire and Burglary Insurance Company, a sidesman of the Church of St. James-the-Less in Camberwell, and the tenant of Mon Repos, Angela Gardens. This was one of some thirty-six admirably conceived houses of a similar and richly ornamented architecture, the front door of each being flanked and surmounted by diamond-shaped panes of blue and vermilion glass; and though it was true that this particular house had been named by the landlord in a foreign tongue, it must not be assumed that this nomenclature in any way met with my father's approval. On the contrary, he had not only protested, but such was his distrust of French morality that he had always insisted,

both for himself and others, upon a strictly English pronunciation.

Somewhat under lower middle height, my father, even as a boy, had been inclined to corpulence, a characteristic, inherited by myself, that he succeeded in retaining to the end of his life. Nor did he ever lose—or not to any marked extent—either the abundant hair that grew upon his scalp, his glossy and luxurious moustache, or his extraordinarily powerful voice. This was a deep bass that in moments of emotion became suddenly converted into a high falsetto, and he never hesitated, in a cause that he deemed righteous, to employ it to its full capacity. Always highly coloured, and the fortunate possessor of an exceptionally large and well-modelled nose, my father's eyes were of a singularly pale, unwinking blue, while in his massive ears, with their boldly outstanding rims, resided the rare faculty of independent motion.

My mother, on the other hand, presented hardly a feature that could, in the strictest sense, have been called beautiful, although she was somewhat taller than my father, with eyes that were similar in their shade of blue. Like my father's, too, her nose was large, but it had been built on lines that were altogether weaker, and the slightly reddish down upon her upper lip

might even by some people have been considered a disfigurement. She had inherited, however, together with five hundred pounds, an apparently gentle disposition, and was a scion or scioness of the Walworth Road branch of the great family of Robinson. Herself the eldest of the nine daughters of Mortimer Robinson, a well-known provision merchant, my father had claimed relationship for her, albeit unsuccessfully, with Peter Robinson of Oxford Street, while he used half humorously to assert her connection with the fictional character* known as Robinson Crusoe. Clean in her habits, quiet about the house, and invariably obedient to his slightest wish, he had very seldom indeed, as he often told me, seriously regretted his choice of a wife.

With sufficient capital, therefore, not only to furnish his house, but to pay its first year's rent and establish an emergency fund, my father might well have been supposed by an ignorant observer to be free from every anxiety. Such was not the case, however, and he was obliged, almost immediately, to face one of the sternest ordeals of his married life. Ardently desiring increase, it was not for nine and a half months that Providence saw fit to answer his prayers, and as week succeeded week and the cradle still remained empty, only his unfaltering faith saved

him from despair. But the hour came at last, and so vividly has my father described it to me that I have long since shared its triumphant joy.

Born at half-past three on a February morning, the world having been decked with a slight snow-fall, it was then that my mother's aunt, Mrs. Emily Smith, opened the bedroom door and emerged on the landing. My father had gone outside to lean over the gate, and was still leaning there when she opened the door, but my mother's mother, with another of my mother's aunts, were standing with bowed heads at the foot of the stairs. Prone in the parlour, and stretched in uneasy attitudes, five of her eight sisters were snatching a troubled sleep, while two fellow-members of my mother's Mothers' Guild were upon their knees in the back kitchen. But for the fact, indeed, that two of my mother's sisters had not, at that time, had their tonsils removed, the whole house would have been wrapped in the profoundest stillness.

My mother's mother was the first to see Mrs. Smith, though she only saw her, as it were, through a mist. Mrs. Smith was the first to speak, in a voice tremulous with emotion.

"Where's Augustus?" she said. Augustus was my father's name.

"He's just gone outside," said my mother's mother.

Something splashed heavily on the hall linoleum. It was a drop of moisture from Mrs. Smith's forehead.

"Tell him," she said, "that he's the father of a son."

My mother's mother gave a great cry. My father was beside her in a single leap. Always, as I have said, highly coloured, his face at this moment seemed literally on fire. The two fellow-members of my mother's Mothers' Guild, accompanied by my father's five sisters-in-law, rushed into the hall. Mrs. Smith leaned over the banisters.

"A boy," she said. "It's a boy."

"A boy?" said my father.

"Yes, a boy," said Mrs. Smith.

There was a moment's hush, and then Nature had its way. My father unashamedly burst into tears. My mother's mother kissed him on the neck just as the two fellow-members burst into a hymn; and a moment later, my mother's five sisters burst simultaneously into the doxology. Then my father recovered himself and held up his hand.

"I shall call him Augustus," he said, "after myself."

“Or tin?” suggested my mother’s mother.
“What about calling him tin, after the saint?”

“How do you mean—tin?” said my father.

“Augus-tin,” said Mrs. Emily Smith.

But my father shook his head.

“No, it shall be tus,” he said. “Tus is better than tin.”

Then his five sisters-in-law resumed the singing, from which the two fellow-members had been unable to desist, until my father, who had been rapidly thinking, once again held up his hand.

“And I shall give the vicar,” he said, “the first opportunity of becoming Augustus’s god-father.”

Then he took a deep breath, threw back his shoulders, tilted his chin, and closed his eyes; and with the full vigour of his immense voice, he, too, joined in the doxology.

CHAPTER II

Trials of my infancy. Varieties of indigestion. I suffer from a local erythema. Instance of my father's unselfishness. Difficulty in providing a second godfather. Unexpected solution of the problem. The ceremony of my baptism. A narrow escape. Was it culpable carelessness? My father transfers his worship to St. James-the-Lesser-Still, Peckham Rye.

WITH the portion of my life that intervened between my birth and my baptism I do not propose, owing to exigencies of space, to deal in the fullest detail. But it may be of some comfort to weaker fellow-sufferers to be assured that, from the outset, the ill health to which I have been a life-long martyr played its part in testing my character. Singularly well formed, of a sanguine complexion, and weighing not less than four and three-quarter pounds, Providence saw fit almost immediately to purge me without medicinal aid. Whether this was due, under Higher Supervision, as my father several times forcibly suggested to her, to some dietary excess or indiscretion on the part of my mother was never determined. But the fact remained that for several weeks I suffered from indigestion in two main directions.

Twice, indeed, on the grounds of health, the ceremony of my baptism had to be postponed; and for hours together, I have been told, I lay upon my back, with my knees drawn up and my fingers clenched, in an anguished endeavour to stifle the moans that I was too enfeebled wholly to suppress. Time after time, too, my mother's mother, the aunt that had stood with her at the bottom of the stairs, and various of my mother's sisters would recommend alternative forms of nourishment. But although, at my father's desire, each of these suggestions was given an immediate trial, it was not for two months, and until I had been subjected to a heart-breaking period of starvation, that an affliction abated to which I have since been liable at any moment of undue excitement.

Chastened within, however, as I had been, I was not to escape chastisement without. For no sooner had I begun, in some small measure, to assimilate the food provided for me than I became the victim of an unfortunate skin complaint known, as I am informed, as erythema. This was happily local, but it gave rise to a very profound irritation, and one that proved, as my father has often assured me, to be of a peculiarly obstinate character. Naturally diffident, owing to the site of the affection, to mention it even to

the family doctor, my parents exhausted their every resource without procuring the least alleviation. Though for night after night they made it a matter of prayer, my sufferings were pitiful, I have been told, to the last extreme; and almost hourly, from supper-time to breakfast, the darkness was rent with my cries.

Unable at last, owing to his acute sensibilities, to witness my agony any longer, my father was obliged, with the deepest reluctance, to confine himself to a separate bedroom. But it was in this extremity that his almost Quixotic unselfishness shone, if possible, with an added lustre. From the time of his marriage to the day of my birth, and as soon thereafter as the doctor had permitted her to rise, my father had been in the habit of enabling my mother to provide him with an early cup of tea. And this he had done by waking her regularly a few minutes before six o'clock. In view of the fact, however, that he was now occupying a different bedroom, and that, owing to my indisposition, she was awake most of the night, he offered to excuse her should she chance to be asleep at that hour, from the performance of this wifely duty. Needless to say, it was not an offer that she could accept. Indeed, in his heart he had not expected her to do so. And I have even considered the incident, in

later days, as illustrative of a certain weakness in my father's character. But I have never been able to regard it without affection or to forbear mentioning it on appropriate occasions.

That in most respects, however, my father's temperament was an exceptionally unflinching one was amply corroborated by the circumstances attendant upon the choice of my second godfather. This gave rise, as my father has frequently told me, to the most prolonged and anxious discussions, and entailed an enormous amount of correspondence, some of which has been preserved among the family documents. For with his ruthless determination, inherited by myself, to discover and expose every kind of wrong-doing, with his life-long habit of informing those in authority of any dereliction of duty in themselves and their subordinates, and with the passion for truth that compelled him on every occasion instantly to correct what he deemed the reverse, my father had necessarily but little leisure to cultivate the easy art of friendship. Amongst his acquaintances, indeed, there were but few that even remotely approximated to his standards; and he had found none that his conscience had permitted him to select for the purposes of personal friendship.

It was for this reason that, on the occasion of

his marriage, he had dispensed with the services of a best man. And although the vicar had eventually agreed to act as one of my male sponsors, the appointment of a second began to assume the proportions of an almost insoluble problem. It being manifestly impossible to hope for a suitable candidate among such persons as occasionally called at the house, and my father's character having long ago isolated him from his more immediate masculine relatives, he resolved at last to appeal to the public sense of the higher officials of the Church of England.

Nor was the result ungratifying, as various letters still in my possession go to prove. Though unable, owing to so many similar and previously acquired obligations, to accede to my father's suggestion, all of them replied with the greatest courtesy. Thus the Dean of St. Paul's wrote in person wishing me every success in life; the Bishop of London trusted that my father's aspirations as to my personal holiness would be realized; while the Archbishop of Canterbury commanded his secretary to express his gratification at the suggestion of an honour that only the exigencies of his position as Primate forbade him to accept. Needless to say, those in charge of the State, whom my father next approached, behaved very differently. Neither the Prime Minister nor

the Home Secretary saw fit to reply at all, while the President of the Board of Trade merely expressed a formal regret. And yet in the end, as is so often the case, the solution proved quite a simple one. Turn but a stone, says a poet,* and start a wing. And my father did not even need to turn a stone. Sick at heart, he was returning home one night when he suddenly caught sight of himself in a cheese-monger's window. It was as though Providence, he said, had touched him on the shoulder. Whereas he had been blind, he said, then he saw. For a moment the shock was almost too much for him. A member of the constabulary, indeed, actually asked him to move on. But the solution was there, staring him in the face. Involuntarily he raised his hat. *He himself was the man.*

With my aunt, Mrs. Emily Smith, only too eager to be my godmother, everything now seemed to be propitious for the happy consummation of my baptism, and no more earnest or reverent gathering could have been found that day in any Metropolitan church. The vicar being godfather, the actual ceremony was, at my father's suggestion, performed by the senior curate, the junior curate, in deference to my father's position as

* I have since learned that he was a Roman Catholic, and I cannot therefore vouch for the accuracy of his statement.

sidesman, being on the vicar's right hand between him and my mother.

On the senior curate's left stood my father, flanked on his own left by the vergers, the circle round the font being completed by Mrs. Emily Smith, my mother's mother, my mother's father, her eight sisters and the aunt that had stood with my mother's mother at the foot of the stairs. A soft April rain was refreshing the outside world, and the first part of the service had been successfully performed, when an incident occurred that might well have been attended with the most tragic and irreparable consequences. For there suddenly took place, just as I had been handed to the senior curate, so acute an exacerbation of the erythema that, in the ensuing convulsion, he was quite unable to retain me in his grasp.

I say unable, but, as my father pointed out to him immediately after the close of the service, had I suffered any provable damage he would certainly have taken legal advice. Falling from his arms, however, I remained poised for a moment upon the extreme brim of the font, and then fell forward, colliding with the vicar, who stumbled backwards in his efforts to save me. From the tottering vicar I then ricocheted, in what I believe is a military phrase, towards the feet of the junior curate, who became unex-

pectedly the instrument of Providence. I do not myself practise, nor do I greatly approve, any form of merely athletic exercise. But it was perhaps fortunate that the curate in question happened to be a skilful player of cricket. For just as my head was within an inch of the floor and the blood had receded from every countenance, he shot out his hand and succeeded in catching me in a position technically known, I believe, as the slips.

"Oh, well held, sir!" cried the senior curate, and then for a moment or two his emotion overcame him.

The vicar, still pale, recovered his balance.

"Poor little Augustus," said my mother; "it's the irritation."

My father frowned at her.

"Without prejudice," he said. And then for perhaps half a minute there was a deathly silence. It was fractured, I have been told, by myself, as the junior curate handed me back to the senior.

But my father intervened.

"Not again," he said. "Never again; never in this world."

The silence was resumed, broken only by myself. My father stood holding me, trembling with emotion. The vicar took a deep breath.

"Is the service to proceed?" he asked.

"Certainly," said my father. "But in other hands."

It was another instance of his dominating character, but also of his innate sense of justice.

"I am not insensible," he said to the senior curate, "of the services that you have already rendered. But in the interests of my son, as you must surely agree, I cannot again trust him to your care."

The senior curate bowed, but did not articulate a reply, and my father then handed me once more to the junior. For a moment the latter hesitated, but at the vicar's request accepted the privilege of concluding my baptism. Later, I have been told, there was a certain amount of argument, in which my father more than held his own, finally absolving the vicar from further sponsorial duties and notifying his decision to transfer his worship elsewhere.

For a man of my father's position this was a serious step. But it was one that he did not hesitate to take. And within a year, as I have always been proud to remember, he had made himself a sidesman at St. James-the-Lesser-Still, Peckham Rye.

CHAPTER III

My parents' studies in the upbringing of children. A successful instance of non-vaccination. Further example of my father's consideration for others. My mother's ill-health. My parents engage a charwoman. Her appearance and character. Physical characteristics of her son. Deplorable social result of the war. Continued presumption of charwoman's son. I rebuff him. Affection for grey rabbit. Charwoman's son's cannon and the use made of it by him. Scenes of violence and intervention of my father. Intervention of charwoman. A lethargic vicar. Was he also immoral? My father transfers his worship to St. James-the-Least-of-All.

APART from the ill-health to which I have previously made reference, but which was punctuated with intervals of comparative well-being, I have always regarded my first five or six years as a particularly fruitful period. At my father's desire, almost in this case a command, my mother began to study various books on childhood, such as Dr. Brewinson's *Childish Complaints*, Mrs. Edward Podmere's *Diet in Infancy*, the Reverend Ambrose Walker's *First Steps in Religion*, Wilbur P. Nathan's *The Babe and the Infinite*, Mrs. Wood-Mortimer's *Clothes and the Young*, and Jonathan and Cornwall's *Dictionary of Home Medicine*. Each of these, with the exception of the *Dictionary*, was borrowed in turn from the nearest public library,

and it became my mother's custom to consecrate her afternoon rest hour to the perusal of these volumes.

According to an arrangement suggested by my father, she would study one chapter each afternoon, or alternatively three and a half pages of the *Dictionary of Home Medicine*. On his return from work, and after she had washed up the supper dishes—for my father at this time did not employ a domestic—he would put her through a searching examination upon what she had read earlier in the day. If, as was frequently the case, since my mother was not naturally scholastic, she failed to satisfy her examiner, he would playfully impose upon her the little penalty of again going through her task before she went to bed. And on such occasions, if he had not fallen asleep, he would re-examine her when she came to bid him good-night. If, on the other hand, her replies had been judged adequate, it was an understood thing that she might claim an extra kiss. So seriously, indeed, did my mother apply herself that she began to grow unattractively thin; and once, when she had failed in her examination on three successive nights, she actually burst into tears. For this feminine weakness, when she had asked his pardon, my father, of course, readily forgave her, merely pointing out that, with my future at stake,

he was obviously unable to relax his standards.

Regarding me thus, from the very first, as a sacred trust committed to their charge, this is but a small example of the immense and unremitting care with which my parents undertook me. But it will at least suffice to show that they had not underrated the high task for which they had been called. To my father especially, as the months slipped all too quickly by, I became inexpressibly dear; and it was for that reason, among others, that I escaped the torments of vaccination. Though Jonathan and Cornwall's *Dictionary of Home Medicine* advocated this operation on historical grounds, my father had an instinctive, but none the less well-reasoned, horror of the knife. Himself the subject of frequent boils, he would never permit these to be lanced, invariably giving orders that they should be poulticed until Nature herself brought about their evacuation. Nor can I say that, in my own case, he has been other than completely justified. It is true that I have suffered, and still do suffer, apart from the indigestion previously referred to, from several forms of neurasthenia, a marked tendency to eczema, occipital headaches, sour eructations, and flatulent distension of the abdomen. But from small-pox, although entirely unvaccinated, I have always remained singularly immune.

A similar prescience, too, sufficed to protect me from the anguish and indignity of personal chastisement. For although in principle my father was an ardent supporter of this, and indeed had administered it to several of his relatives' children, he had never required it, he said, in his own case, and did not propose to have it inflicted on me. And it was the abrogation of this rule, although not until my seventh year, by the son of a powerful Hibernian charwoman that first revealed to me, in a never-to-be-forgotten flash, some of the profoundest depths of human iniquity.

It was soon after my sixth birthday that my father was first compelled to employ a charwoman, owing to an attack of unconsciousness on the part of my mother. For several months she had been complaining of breathlessness, incident upon certain of her domestic duties, such as floor-scrubbing, home laundry-work, cleaning the front steps, and polishing the boots and shoes. With his usual consideration my father had instantly remitted various other tasks proper to her position, such as the baking of bread twice a week, and the knitting of the family socks and stockings; and he had further excused her from my own daily tuition in both Latin and arithmetic. Involving, as these subjects did, considerable previous preparation, this was, of course, a

sensible relief, obtained though it was at some hazard to my own intellectual future. But despite all these concessions, she continued to be unwell, and finally, as I have said, lapsed into unconsciousness.

For a brief period, therefore, and after medical advice, my father resolved to employ extraneous aid, and at a very considerable financial sacrifice engaged a person called Mrs. O'Flaherty. The widow of a colour-sergeant, and one of the church scrubbers, she was highly recommended by the vicar of St. James-the-Lesser-Still, and was not devoid, in certain deceptive respects, of the superficial charm of her race. Ominously developed as she was, both below and above the waist, her features were informed with an unintelligent but specious cheerfulness; and these, together with a not unattractive complexion, sufficed for some time to impose upon my mother.

My father, from the beginning, had his doubts of her character, but in view of the vicar's recommendation, decided to employ her; and for the first month or two, apart from her habit of singing, found no cause for particular complaint. He even went as far, upon my mother's intercession, as to allow the woman to bring her youngest child with her, a somewhat gross and over-exuberant lad a few months younger than myself.

That this youth, practically a gutter-snipe, and afterwards a private in the army, should have become a Brigadier-General in the late war, and even have received, as I understand, some kind of decoration, was one of the most deplorable of the many social upheavals for which that disaster was responsible.

From the very outset, with that sensitiveness of vision granted by Providence to certain children, I regarded this new intruder with the deepest suspicion. Obviously inheriting the physique of his mother, and as it seemed the proclivities of his father, his chief article of amusement appeared to be a small cannon, equipped with a spring for purposes of propulsion. This he offered to lend me on the occasion of his first visit, but declining his advances I moved to another room, where I continued my study of a book upon the apostles, written for the young by a Somersetshire clergyman.

Undeterred, however, by a reticence that should have been more than sufficient for a boy with the least good feeling, Desmond, for that was his pretentious name, made a similar offer on his second visit. Again I declined and removed myself, subsequently mentioning the matter to my father, who instantly gave orders that for the future Mrs. O'Flaherty's boy was

to be confined to the kitchen.

"You will kindly make it clear," he said, "to your son that I cannot have my own son disturbed, and that admission to my house does not necessarily include admission to my social circle."

Unfortunately, owing to a very natural slip due to the rapidity of his elocution, my father pronounced these words as *sershle soakle*; and I have never forgotten the vulgar and ill-concealed grin with which Mrs. O'Flaherty promised to attend to the matter.

Upon the following Saturday, however, a beautiful day in June, with the gerania in the front garden in full bloom, Desmond O'Flaherty again began to make overtures to me through the open door of the kitchen. The parlour door being again ajar, I was, of course, visible to him as I reclined on the sofa; and I instantly observed that he had brought his cannon with him and that its muzzle was pointing towards myself. Informing me that his pocket was full of peas, suitably dried for the purposes of ammunition, he then invited me to become his companion in a game of definitely military character.

This I refused, and I can still recall every detail of all that followed. Happily employed combing a grey rabbit. to which I was deeply

attached, and which I had named, but a day or two previously, after the major prophet Isaiah, I heard a faint click, and the next moment was violently struck upon the back of my hand. Unable to suppress a cry of pain, I involuntarily tightened my grip on Isaiah, who suddenly turned his head and made a movement as if about to bite my index finger. Realizing as I did, from my knowledge of the *Dictionary of Home Medicine*, the fatal consequences that might possibly have ensued, I flung him from me and sprang to the floor, almost beside myself with fear and anguish. With an expression of reproach that cut me to the very heart Isaiah then retreated behind the harmonium; and at the same moment I heard a raucous laugh proceeding from the direction of Desmond.

But for Desmond and his mother I was alone in the house, yet I did not hesitate to advance towards the kitchen and grind the cannon beneath my foot. Twice I stamped upon it in what still seems to me a wholly righteous indignation, and in a couple of seconds I had reduced it to an irreparable wreck. For a moment Desmond said nothing. I had taken him by surprise. But then he rushed towards me with a kind of snort, and fiercely hit me on a face already suffused with tears. I turned away from him shaken with sobs.

But his bestial appetites were still unsated. A second and a third time he hit me, on both occasions on the neck, and followed this up by an assault with his foot upon the lower portion of my back. But my cries, now almost amounting to shrieks, had by this time attracted Mrs. O'Flaherty, and at the same instant my father, returning early, unlocked the front door. In a flash I was in his arms and had sobbed out to him the whole pitiful tale. I felt him quiver and then control himself, as he gently placed me to one side. Then he advanced to Desmond, pointing to the crumpled cannon.

"Pick that up," he said, "and leave this house for ever."

Desmond replied insolently that he would not do so, whereupon my father struck him smartly upon the cheek. For a moment Desmond glared at him, and then, lowering his head, he rushed at my father, beating him with both fists. Taken unawares, my father was obliged to sit heavily down upon an entirely unpadded hall chair, and once again I observed a malignant smile upon the face of Mrs. O'Flaherty. But it was only momentary. For, thrusting the little savage away from him, my father hit him twice with the handle of his walking-stick.

As well aimed as they were richly deserved,

these blows took instant effect, the first knocking the evil lad sideways, and the second dividing the integument of his forehead. Suffering though he was, my father then rose to his feet and was once more about to address Desmond, when Mrs. O'Flaherty, revealed in her true character, ferociously caught him by the shoulders. As I have already recorded, she was a woman of repulsively over-developed physique, and she now began to shake my father so violently that his upper denture fell to the ground.

"You little whelp!" she cried, with incredible blasphemy, "you little whelp of a bullying puff-ball!"

Then to my horror, no less than to his own, she lifted him bodily from the ground. For a brief moment, or so it seemed to me, I was on the verge of a merciful oblivion, but the next instant I beheld Mrs. O'Flaherty thrusting my father's head into her pail. It was a commodious pail, very nearly full with incompletely clean water, and containing in addition the saturate garment with which it was her habit to wash the linoleum. Three separate times she immersed his head in this, even submerging the backs of his ears, and when at last she released him, and he had regained his breath, he was more moved than I had ever seen him.

Always eloquent, his denunciation of her conduct, deservedly attuned to the level of her understanding, was of a severity that has scarcely been equalled even in the writings of my rabbit's namesake. Time after time, with a holy passion that repeatedly interfered with his respiration, he felt it obligatory to adjure his Creator to consign such a soul to its just perdition. And when Mrs. O'Flaherty handed him his upper denture he dashed it once more to the ground. Finally he commanded her to leave the house instantly, frankly informing her that he should prosecute her for assault.

"Yes, it'll look real nice," she said, "in the local papers, chippin' a child's 'ead open and 'avin' yer own in a pail."

The malevolence with which she said this was almost inconceivable. But, as my father pointed out to me when she had gone, it raised issues of the profoundest importance that would demand his most serious consideration. For while in his own person—in *propria persona**—it might be his duty to bring her before the magistrates, it might be no less important, as a sidesman of the Established Church, to avoid the contingent publicity. This, indeed, was the decision to which he ultimately came, and as an instance of what

* In his own person.

may be called, perhaps, his sanctified statesmanship, it has always seemed to me to shed a peculiar radiance upon one of the sublimest aspects of his character. With regard, however, to the lethargy, little less than criminal, of the vicar of St. James-the-Lesser-Still, I have always been at a loss; and I cannot help suspecting, as indeed my father openly suggested to him, that his relations with Mrs. O'Flaherty were not at all what they should have been. For not only did he deprecate, having heard my father's narrative, what he weakly described as any precipitate action, but she was actually observed by an acquaintance of my father's scrubbing the church floor upon the following evening.

Under such circumstances my father had no choice but to hasten instantly to the vicarage, where he confronted the vicar with the suggestion—an extremely natural one—already referred to. But his reply, as my father has often assured me, was neither Xtian nor even gentlemanly, and my father was obliged therefore, with the deepest reluctance, once more to transfer his worship. It was a serious step, but he had been fortified with the experience previously forced upon him at St. James-the-Less, and in less than five months he had become one of the foremost sidesmen at St. James-the-Least-of-All, Kennington Oval.

CHAPTER IV

Further years of boyhood and additional crosses. Progress in study and music. I excel at the game of Nuts in May. I am to go to Hopkinson House School. But Providence again intervenes. I become a victim of the ring-worm. Devastating effect of an ointment. Mr. Balfour Whey and his sons. A brutal County Court judge. But my father obtains damages.

PHYSICALLY shattered as I had been by the attack on my person by Desmond O'Flaherty, the mental and spiritual consequences of this assault were far more serious and prolonged. Awakened for the first time to the contemporary existence of a depravity hitherto unsuspected by me, I was unable for several weeks to regain my previous composure, or indeed to venture unaccompanied beyond the precincts of the house. Nor could I bear even to contemplate the introduction of a successor to Mrs. O'Flaherty.

For that reason, although still in poor health, my mother was obliged to resume her former duties, while my father was confirmed in his decision to postpone my schooldays for another three or four years. To this he had already been inclined, partly owing to the representations that I myself had been compelled to make to him, and

partly owing to his desire to assist me as far as possible in bearing the crosses with which Providence had entrusted me. Far beyond the average both in weight and number, I can realize now, of course, what a privilege these were. But in the earlier years of my boyhood they taxed my faith to its utmost powers.

Many were the times, for instance, when after a long morning's study, merely interrupted by an occasional cup of cocoa, I turned with avidity to a simple but abundant meal of roast pork and open jam tart, only to find myself, an hour or two later, rolling in agony upon the sofa, or even indeed summoned on certain occasions to yield it back whence it came. This was perhaps the hardest lesson of all. But I am happy to say that at last I learned it. And I can well remember the pride with which my father hurrying into the parlour with a convenient receptacle, first found me consoling myself with some appropriate verses from an early chapter of the book of Job.

That incident alone, as my father often used to say, was a complete justification of his decision to postpone my school life; and I am quite confident that, had I been earlier subjected to the propinquity of coarser-fibred boys, I should never have survived to render adult service to the men and women of my time. Nor should I have made,

I am sure, such intellectual progress as I achieved between my sixth and eleventh birthdays. Familiar from cover to cover not only with the Holy Bible, but also with the Apocrypha, I had attained dexterity in simple division, was acquainted with the geography of the British Isles, and had read the history of England so far as the reign of Queen Anne. Passionately devoted to music, I had taught myself to play from memory the airs of a large number of well-known hymns, including several of the more rapid and accentuated of the late Messrs. Moody and Sankey. Subject to my father's guidance, too, I ranged in boyish fashion amongst literature of a lighter order. With some of the works of Longfellow, for instance, I was soon so familiar as to be able to repeat them without a mistake, and I can still recall the delight with which I read a work of fiction in which Martin Luther was one of the characters portrayed.

Happy as I was, however, with some such volume as this, a pound or two of chocolates, and my rabbit Isaiah, or to settle down for a long summer afternoon with the Hymnal Companion to the Book of Common Prayer, I was not averse from an occasional ramble in the company of my father, or even from exercise of a more vehement order with younger and suitable com-

rades. The chief of these latter was Emily Smith, the grand-daughter of Mrs. Emily Smith, my mother's aunt, a gentle child, who was unfortunately an albino, but of a deeply religious and sympathetic nature.

A year or two older than myself, she lived with her grandmother at New Cross, and in her company and that of some of her school companions, I played several health-giving and mirthful games. One of our favourites, I remember, was Hide and Go Seek, combining both physical and mental exertion; and another, of which we were hardly less fond, was known as Nuts in May.

For the purposes of this latter game those who proposed to take part would first form themselves into two equal groups, the members of each moiety then standing side by side, facing the same way and holding each other's hands. The two groups would then take up positions, each opposite each, in joyous anticipation, and so arranged as to secure a space between them sufficient for an alternating advance and retreat. By a previous arrangement one of the two sides would then approximate itself to the other, singing in unison and to an established melody, the following humorously incongruous lines:

Here we go gathering nuts in May, nuts in May, nuts in May,
Here we go gathering nuts in May
On a cold and frosty morning.

That we were not, in fact, doing so was of course obvious. But the innocent laughter that the words always provoked in us was quite sufficient, in the opinion of myself and my comrades, to rob them of any semblance of deliberate untruthfulness.

It would then become the turn of the previously silent and stationary players to advance singing a second stanza, in which they would merrily inquire which of their number was to be chosen as symbolic of these nuts in May. To them in reply the first group would designate a member of the second, whereupon the second group would once more advance with the very pertinent query:

Whom will you send to fetch her (or him, if it was myself) away, fetch her (or him, if it was myself) away, fetch her (or him, if it was myself) away,

*Whom will you send to fetch her (or him, if it was myself) away,
On a cold and frosty morning?*

The members of the first group would then select one of their comrades to be the emissary of conveyance, and to the same melody and with a similar gesture, would announce their choice to the second group. A pocket-handkerchief, folded upon itself diagonally, would then be stretched upon the grass, parallel to and midway between the merry and expectant companies of players.

The symbolized nut and its would-be gatherer would then face each other across the extended handkerchief, grasp hands, and each earnestly endeavour to draw the other across the separating fabric. To whomsoever was successful the other would then be accorded as a member henceforward of the victor's group, and the game would proceed as before with ever-increasing mirth.

Ultimately it might happen, and indeed it often did, that one of the sides would finally absorb the other, and the absorbing side usually including myself, my services were naturally in the keenest demand. I soon found, in fact, that, in spite of my ill-health, I was singularly adapted to this form of recreation. Inheriting, as I did, to a very great extent, my father's powerful and sonorous voice, I was able to throw myself with dominating effect into the preliminary vocal exchanges, while my physique stood me in admirable stead in the later stages of the game. For though I was short, with singularly slender arms, my abdomen was large and well covered, while my feet, with their exceptional length and breadth and almost imperceptible arches, enabled me to obtain a tenacious hold of the ground upon which they were set.

So proficient, in fact, did I become that when I went to school I was bitterly disappointed to

find that this, my favourite game of play, was not even included in the curriculum. In later years I have heard this game criticized both on moral and physical grounds, and even my friend and vicar, the Reverend Simeon Whey, has had grave doubts as to its permissibility. On many occasions indeed we have sat far into the night arguing about its effect on the Xtian character. But I am happy to say that he has now gone so far as to approve of it for others. Indeed, as I have more than once facetiously suggested to him, his real objections to the game have been personal, founded on a lack of success in its practice that may well have prejudiced his outlook. For though he is no mean exponent of the game of Draughts, as well as that of Word Making and Word Taking, at Nuts in May he has seldom, if ever, avoided being drawn across the handkerchief. As the result of my protests, however, he has continued to permit the game to be one of the brightest features of our annual Sunday School gatherings; and most of our school-mistresses, I think, would be compelled to testify that I have retained all my old-time skill.

In such fashion, then, I emerged into my twelfth year; and, albeit with considerable misgivings, my father arranged at last for my entry into a high-class school in the neighbourhood.

Known as Hopkinson House School for the Sons of Gentlemen, it was conveniently situated in Jasmine Grove on the southern outskirts of Camberwell, and included features in its dignified exterior of almost every type of architecture. Approached by a semi-circular gravel drive with gates of entry and exit, it was flanked on both sides, and isolated in the rear, by an asphalt recreation-ground. Above the front steps, two chocolate-coloured pillars supported a classical portico, and the windows of the first-floor rooms were surmounted with characteristic Gothic mouldings. The windows of the first, second and third storeys were of a simpler Georgian pattern, but the roof was uplifted, at its anterior corners, into castellated Norman turrets. Midway between these, an Elizabethan gable formed a pleasing contrast, and the two chimney-stacks, each bearing a lightning-conductor, were decorated with Moorish relief work.

Conducted by a Mr. Septimus Lorton, the successor to Mr. Hopkinson, the founder of the school, it was daily attended by some seventy or eighty of the sons of the Peckham and Camberwell gentry. Concerning Mr. Lorton, I shall have more to say presently; but just about a week before what was to have been my first term, a tender but inscrutable Providence once again

intervened. The agent of this new affliction was a parasite commonly known, I understand, as the ring-worm, and within a brief period it had established upon my head no less than four separate colonies. That being the case, not only was my school-life yet a second time postponed, but I was obliged to render up, under medical orders, and that the extent of the malady might be the more easily discernible, the greater proportion of my abundant and not unattractive chestnut hair. To the first of these consequences I was reconciled with no great difficulty, but to the second, I must confess, resignation was not so easy; and for night after night my pillow was moistened with tears scarcely restrained during the day. But worse was to follow. For upon the appearance of a fifth and even more intractable settlement, the doctor in charge of the case took this opportunity of prescribing a wholly unjustifiable ointment. That it slew the parasites was undoubtedly true. But such were the ravages of this violent medicament that, to an accompaniment of the acutest distress, the whole of my hair disappeared.

Even in this, however, probably up till then the darkest hour of my existence, Providence had set a rainbow across my despair from which I have never since failed to glean comfort. Roused to the very depths of his indignant paternity, my

father immediately began to take steps against the doctor, while both Mrs. Emily Smith, the grandmother of my little comrade, and the aunt that had stood with my mother's mother at the bottom of the stairs, provided me with velveteen skull-caps, skilfully embroidered with forget-me-nots.

Perhaps the most fruitful, however, of the issues of this affliction, apart from the damages that my father ultimately secured, was the life-long friendship that it produced between ourselves and the Whey family. A junior sidesman to my father at St. James-the-Least-of-All, Mr. Balfour Whey, was not only a rising solicitor, but the father of two boys, Simeon and Silas. To the elder of these, Simeon, I have already referred as the vicar of the parish in which I at present reside. But Silas, since dead under distressing circumstances, to which I shall refer in due course, was but half an hour younger, and they were usually regarded as being twins.

Xtian lads of about my own age, and each with an impediment in his speech, both were destined on this account for eventual ordination in the Church of England. What knitted us together, however, at this painful juncture was the curious fact that, in addition to others, both of them were suffering like myself from an inva-

sion of the ring-worm. Adequately treated however, they had retained their hair, and, as their father immediately perceived, might for this reason prove invaluable witnesses in the prosecution upon which we had determined.

In this Mr. Balfour Whey had already consented to act as my father's legal adviser, on the understanding that, if the case should fail, my father should be exempt from the payment of charges, while, if it should succeed, the damages should be shared between them on agreed and equitable terms. An extremely forcible Hibernian barrister was then engaged on a similar basis, and never shall I forget the ^rable determination of these two earnest and devoted men. Fortified with the assistance, somewhat expensive, but under the circumstances deemed necessary, of an extremely adaptable, intelligent, and experienced medical expert, they proved far too powerful both for the doctor, a young man unrepresented by counsel, and even for the County Court judge, a sinister-looking person, evidently addicted to alcohol. Nevertheless, it was no easy fight and the bias of the judge was obvious from the outset. Time after time when my father rose from his seat in the well of the court to make ejaculations, he commanded him to be silent in a tone of voice that no gentleman should

have used to another. And once when my mother's aunt, Mrs. Emily Smith, and the aunt that had stood with my mother's mother at the foot of the stairs, rose simultaneously and cried, "Oh, you story," after an unveracious comment by the doctor, he actually threatened to have them ejected by one of his underlings in the court.

Nor was he more polite to my mother's eight sisters, industrious young women who had brought their knitting, even going so far as to say that, if they continued to rattle their needles, he should have them similarly transported. To this my father very naturally objected in one of his most dignified and impassioned speeches, again cut short, though not without the utmost difficulty, by this self-assertive and presumptuous man. Even to Simeon and Silas Whey, each of whom had covered the Bible with kisses, he behaved in such a fashion as entirely to rob them of their natural joy in being in the witness-box. For though it was true, and only to be expected, that their vocal disabilities were increased by their excitement, he not only professed to consider them irrelevant, but brutally informed them that they were unintelligible. For a moment we were stunned. But then, as one woman, my mother's eight sisters rose to

their feet, as did Mrs. Balfour Whey, Mrs. Emily Smith, and the aunt that had stood with my mother's mother at the foot of the stairs. Led by my father they shouted "Shame" in tones that shook the very roof, while the Hibernian barrister, with a gesture that I have never seen equalled, swept his papers from the desk before him, and sank speechless into his seat.

It was such a scene as no one in the court had probably ever before witnessed, and even the judge seemed slightly taken aback by the volume of resentment that he had aroused. It was, at any rate, with a distinct tremor and in markedly altered tones that he ordered the proceedings to be resumed. And when I myself, as the prosecution's last witness, proceeded to take the oath in my velveteen skull-cap, his change of colour was so manifest as to become the subject of general comment.

Keeping my face firmly towards him, upon the advice of my counsel, I stood unshaken, albeit not unmoved, during the latter's preliminary remarks. Here was a lad, he said, in the soft and vibrant tones of the convinced and accomplished pleader, the only lad, nay, the only child, the solitary hope of his devoted parents. Too delicate hitherto to have been sent to the school—the scholastic establishment for which his abilities

had long since qualified him, he had been happily expecting, with all the ardour that His Honour would observe imprinted on his countenance, to have entered this academy of learning some seven weeks before. But what had happened? His Honour had heard. It was the subject matter of this action. Not only had his career, since time was money, been already seriously crippled, but he had been subjected to a personal mutilation, the moral effect of which it was impossible to appraise. One moment a happy—nay, he might almost say without unduly straining the truth—one moment a happy, but not only a happy, a positively handsome young gentleman, he had been reduced in the next, either by wilful design, by malevolent neglect, or by an infamous want of knowledge, to the spectacle that he would be obliged—how reluctantly His Honour could imagine—to submit to His Honour's inspection.

Here a low ripple of sympathy and horror broke involuntarily from most of those present; and it was perhaps significant, as Mr. Whey remarked to my father, that the judge took no steps to suppress it. Then, after a brief question or two, since, as my counsel said, mine was an ordeal that he dared not long prolong, he asked me to remove my velveteen skull-cap and let His Honour see what was underneath. It was

an effort. But I achieved it, and the effect on the judge was instantaneous. In spite of his pallor, he had still, up to that point, retained some evidences of his gross habit of life. But now the last vestige of his colour had left him, and he seemed visibly to have lost weight. Contracted to pin-points, his pupils were fixed upon my scalp in a haggard yet fascinating stare; and great beads of perspiration began to glisten upon his forehead. Then, with a sharp expiration like that of a punctured bicycle tyre, he covered his eyes for a moment with his hand, and I knew instinctively, as I replaced my skull-cap, that the case was won.

There were further arguments, of course, and technical exchanges, but to everyone in court they must have seemed of little moment; and I was soon being embraced by father, my aunts and great-aunts, in the happy consciousness that right had triumphed. Nor was that all. For thanks to the damages awarded, my father and myself were enabled to spend a month at Scarborough, while a generous fee was paid by a well-known firm of hair-restorers for a copy of a photograph of my head that my father had thoughtfully taken. Two years later they paid a similar sum for a photograph of the same area normally covered, both being subsequently reproduced,

under another name, of course, and with the interval diminished for commercial purposes, as illustrative of the effects of what has since become, I believe, a very profitable commodity.

CHAPTER V

First experiences at Hopkinson House School. It is amongst the masters that I hope to find spiritual companionship. I do not do so. Apology of Mr. Muglington. I am struck by a football. Subsequent apology of Mr. Beerthorpe. Degraded habits of my fellow-scholars. A fearful discovery and its sequel. Amazing ineptitude of Mr. Lorton. Concerted assault upon my person. I am rescued by my father, who procures a public apology.

OWING to the successive delays imposed by my general ill-health, the assault upon my person by Desmond O'Flaherty, the sudden invasion of the ring-worm, and the cranial nudity wrought by the ointment, it was not until I was nearly fourteen that I was at last able to attend school; and even then it was perhaps doubtful whether my father should have recommended it. For, although by that time my health was somewhat less precarious, the chastening experiences that I had been called upon to endure had naturally lifted me, in almost every aspect, far above the plane of most of my contemporaries. And while it was true, of course, that in Simeon and Silas Whey I should find sympathetic and well-liked comrades, I was so much older, both mentally and spiritually, than such of their acquaintances as I had chanced to meet that it was only amongst the masters that there seemed any

reasonable hope of obtaining an equal and appropriate companionship.

It was to this end, therefore, while endeavouring at the same time to place my services at the disposal of my fellow-scholars, that I resolved from the outset to encourage my tutors to perceive in me a staunch and valuable associate. For the first few days this was not of course easy, owing to the natural confusion incident upon a new term, and it was only by the interjection of an occasional informative remark that I was enabled to adumbrate my ultimate purpose.

Thus when our form-master, a Mr. Muglington, asked me if I knew the capital of Belgium, I replied that while I had not as yet enjoyed the opportunity of paying the town a personal visit, I had been credibly informed that it was known as Brussels, so indissolubly associated with the well-known brassica.* Though he was a repellent-looking man with a ginger moustache, I had nevertheless accompanied the words with a friendly smile. But he merely stared at me in what I was compelled to recognise as a singularly crude and offensive fashion.

“Let me see,” he said, “I think your name is Carp.”

*The botanical family that includes the sprout. I am now convinced that Mr. Muglington did not know this.

"Augustus Carp," I replied, "of Angela Gardens."

"Then kindly remember," he said, "to confine yourself in future to the information asked for and nothing else."

It was, of course, the speech of a peculiarly narrow-minded and vindictive man, fortuitously thrust into a position of authority that had evidently nourished his worst propensities. But I had not as yet realized how deplorably typical he was of the class to which he belonged, and it was a considerable time before I could restrain the sobs that his infamous words had provoked. Nor did he fail to take a further and dastardly advantage of my emotion.

"Perhaps," he observed, with a malignant sneer, "when you've quite finished chewing the cud, you'd be so kind as to oblige us by enumerating the principal exports of Finland."

Afterwards, I am glad to say, thanks to the instant and imperative demand of my father, he was obliged to apologize to me both in my father's presence and in that of the head master, Mr. Septimus Lorton. But it was not an apology, as I discerned at once, founded on any real and heart-felt contrition, and although I assured him that, so far as I was concerned, he might consider the incident closed, it was perfectly apparent to

me that I could never in the future admit him to the privileges of friendship.

Nor was I destined to receive a more satisfying response from the next advance that it seemed my duty to make. Excused on moral grounds from the study of French by a special stipulation of my father, I was permitted instead to take extra lessons in German from a Mr. Beerthorpe. A stoutly-built man with extremely short sight, corrected by lenses of exceptional thickness, I was at first attracted to this person by an expression of what I soon discovered was a spurious amiability. I was also distressed to find him almost universally alluded to by the first syllable of his name only, to which the letter y, not originally present in it, had been appended by way of suffix.

Whether or not he was aware of this I did not, of course, know, but both as an act of kindness and in justice to myself, I felt it incumbent on me to seek the earliest chance of dissociating myself from such a practice. I accordingly took the opportunity one day, when he was acting as arbitrator in a game of football in the playground, of approaching him and touching him on the elbow and suggesting that I should like to have a few words with him.

"Eh, what?" he said. "Foul," and he then

blew a blast, I remember, on a small whistle. Taken unawares, I could not refrain from shuddering a little, and instinctively put my hands to my ears.

“Well, what is it?” he asked. “What’s the matter?”

“Perhaps we might withdraw,” I replied, “to some quieter place.”

“But what’s the trouble?” he said. “Look out,” and he abruptly leapt back to avoid the oncoming football. Not so fortunate, and left entirely unprotected by Mr. Beerthorpe’s sudden retreat, I received the full impact of the hurtling projectile upon the upper part of my neck and my left ear, and for some moments I was entirely unable to proceed with the conversation. Indeed had the missile been of the egg-shaped variety frequently employed, I understand, in the same barbarous pursuit, the blow might well have had the most serious, if not fatal, consequences. Nor could I help feeling a trifle disheartened to perceive, when I had regained my powers of speech, that Mr. Beerthorpe was still callously blowing his whistle in a remote corner of the playground. Under such circumstances many another lad would have been deflected from his purpose. But in spite of what followed, I have always been glad to remember that I did not allow myself to be

deterred. Approaching him a second time, I again touched his elbow.

"Good God," he said, "are you still there?"

Naturally flinching a little at the expletive, I reminded him that I had still something to communicate.

"Oh, all right," he said. "Come along then."

He handed his instrument to a neighbouring boy.

"Well, what is it?" he asked.

We entered an empty schoolroom.

"Perhaps I may first," I said, "ask you to accept this."

It was a box of chocolates weighing half a pound and tastefully adorned with a lemon-coloured ribbon.

"It is merely a token," I proceeded, "albeit I hope an acceptable one, of a desire to inaugurate friendly relations."

For a moment he stared at it with his mouth open and then made a rasping noise in the back of his throat.

"But look here," he said, "you don't mean to tell me that you've interrupted a game of football just to bring me in here and give me half a pound of chocolates?"

"Not wholly," I said, "nor even principally, though I am naturally a little wounded by your

tone of voice. But I also desired to inform you that you were the subject of a prevalent indignity from which personally I have strongly dissented."

"Good God!" he said. "What on earth do you mean?"

After flinching a second time, I lowered my voice a little.

"I thought you ought to know," I said, "that you are very generally referred to—I trust without foundation—as Beery."

For perhaps twelve, or it might have been thirteen, seconds, the silence was only broken by the cries of the footballers. But I observed that his cheeks were suffused with blood and his myopic eyes beginning to bulge. It was a repulsive sight, and then, like Mr. Muglington, he stood revealed in his true character. No less intoxicated than the former with the petty authority conferred by his position, his general conduct, as well as his verbiage, was even coarser and more debased.

"Look here," he said, "young What's-your-name, I don't know your name, and I don't want to. But if I have any more of your insolence I shall report you to the headmaster. And now you can clear out and take your chocolates with you."

Stung to the quick, and with the tears running down my cheeks, I nevertheless held up my hand.

"One moment," I said. "You have misapprehended me, and it was perhaps foolish of me to have supposed that it could have been otherwise. But I must clearly point out to you, both for my own sake and that of the school to which we both belong, that it will be rather I who shall be obliged to report you for the language that I have listened to this day."

Florid to an extreme that I have seldom seen equalled, he opened his mouth once or twice in silence. Then he wiped his forehead with the back of his hand.

"I had rather flattered myself," he said, "on my temperance."

"On the contrary," I said, "I am obliged to remind you that you have twice openly invoked the Deity."

"Good God!" he gasped.

I opened the door for him.

"That makes the third time," I said. "You will hear more of this."

I had preserved my self-control, but it was only with an effort that left me pitiably weak and wretched and induced a gastritis that robbed me of several minutes' sleep as well as of most of my evening meal. Thanks, however, to a second and even more trenchant interview between my father and Mr. Lorton, during which it transpired that

Mr. Beerthorpe was the father of five unfortunate children, he, too, was obliged to apologize to me and give me an undertaking to restrain his blasphemy. But, as my father agreed, it was an apology obviously given with the utmost reluctance and affording no hope of the happier communion to which I had at one time looked forward.

Meanwhile I had not neglected my fellow-students, unattractive to me as most of them were, and more than once had I offered my spiritual services to an inexperienced or erring class-mate. That these had been fruitless I am not prepared to say. But it was perhaps not surprising, considering the standard of the masters, that the general moral status of their pupils should have left almost everything to be desired. Such a rule, for example, as that forbidding the ingestion of sweetmeats during the hours set apart for study was daily infringed, not only by the younger boys, but by many far older than myself. Exhibitions, too, of personal violence were only too common in the playground, and I had even heard boys, presumably the sons of gentlemen, making use of the word damn.*

* I repeat this with regret. But truth is often best served, I have found, by being completely outspoken.

It was not until nearly half-term, however, under the eyes of Mr. Lorton, and in the most sacred hour of the scholastic week, that I suddenly became conscious of the existence of an evil that for a moment completely paralyzed me. Himself an organizer rather than a scholar, a proprietor rather than a professor, Mr. Lorton confined himself, in respect of actual teaching, to the exposition of the Holy Scriptures. For this purpose he visited each class once a week in rotation, the text-book employed being the Lorton Bible for Schools, published by his brother, Mr. Chrysostom Lorton. We had been studying, I remember, the Second Book of Kings, and considering the evil reign of Pekahiah, when Mr. Lorton suddenly asked the head boy of the form if he could tell him the name of his successor.

This was, of course, Pekah, the son of Remaliah, with whom I had been familiar for several years. But unfortunately my position in the centre of the class forbade my giving an immediate answer. Nevertheless, I perceived, as boy after boy mutely revealed the depths of his ignorance, that I had probably been destined by the grace of Providence to become the means of their enlightenment. What was my horror, then, on this beautiful autumn day, with the November

sunlight slanting through the window, to observe Harold Harper, the boy on my left, and Henry Hancock, the boy on my right, each studying the Second Book of Kings under the shelter conferred by his desk. Objectionable lads as I knew them both to be, I had never dreamed them to have been capable of this, and when Henry Hancock rose in his place and without a tremor said, "Pekah, son of Remaliah," it was as though each syllable had been a knife deeply plunged into my very vitals. Pale with wrath I rose to my feet.

"Sir," I cried, "Henry Hancock was deceiving you. He read his answer from the open Scripture."

There was a deathly pause.

"And not only that," I said, "but Harold Harper was prepared to do the same."

Mr. Lorton removed his eye-glasses.

"Hancock and Harper," he said, "stand up."

They did so, but with marked reluctance.

"Hancock and Harper," he said, "is this true?"

They were silent. But their faces betrayed them, as did Harper's Bible, that slipped to the floor.

"Hancock and Harper," said Mr. Lorton, "I

am ashamed of you. You must each write me out fifty lines."

"But, sir," I cried, "in justice to myself, who knew the correct answer without committing sacrilege, nay, in justice to my fellow-scholars, to say nothing of Holy Writ, surely these lads must be subjected to some less trivial and severer penalty."

Mr. Lorton readjusted his glasses. Then he removed them again and began to wipe them.

"Hanper and Harcock," he said, "I mean Harcock and Hanper, as Carp has reminded you, you have sinned very grievously. But I hope—er—this publicity, this publicity, I say, will not be lacking in its due effect upon you."

"But, sir," I cried, "these are mere words."

"They are very serious ones," he said, "very serious ones. Also, as I said, you will each write me fifty lines. And now perhaps Smith Major can tell us who Argob was."

Petrified by the levity with which the very owner of the school was able to endure so shattering an exposure, I remained standing for several seconds, wholly unable to utter a syllable. And when I sank at last, stunned and unsupported, into the seat from which I had so lately risen, it was as though my boyhood (and indeed this was actually the case) had been finally

snatched from me for ever. Nor was this the end. For, when we emerged into the playground, I found myself surrounded by an opprobrious mob, evidently suborned by Harper and Hancock for the purposes of physical assault and battery. Thrust from one to the other, my collar was disarranged, I was several times smitten upon the face, and it was only by the exercise of my utmost lung-power that I succeeded in attracting adult attention. Indeed I am almost certain that I observed Mr. Muglington and Mr. Beerthorpe lurking supine behind a curtain, and it was by no less a person than my own father that I was ultimately removed from danger.

Collecting an account a couple of streets away, he had instantly recognized my screams, and, abandoning everything, had rushed to my aid just as Mr. Lorton hurried into the playground. But my father was first, and never shall I forget the stentorian thunder of his tones. Seizing in each hand one of my lesser persecutors, he shook them like thistles before the wind, while time after time, breaking into his highest falsetto, he overtopped even my most piercing note. Colourless and stricken, a little group of masters stood huddled against the wall of the house, while an ever-growing stream of neighbours and local tradesmen began to throng every inch of the

asphalt. Then, with a final and supreme imprecation, he flung the two ruffians into the midst of their fellows, and clasping me to his bosom, clove his way through the now vociferously applauding multitude. It was perhaps the greatest moment of his career, but like myself he had to pay the penalty of it, and for the following two weeks we were confined in adjacent bedrooms, while my mother had to wait upon us night and day. Afterwards, shaken as he was, he had a third interview with Mr. Lorton, insisting upon and obtaining a public apology as the only alternative to legal proceedings.

CHAPTER VI

Reasons for remaining at Hopkinson House School. I pass from boyhood to early young manhood. Expeditions both urban and rural in the company of my dear father. An excellent and little-known diversion. Youthful adventures by sea and land. But what is to be my career leaving school? Various alternatives prayerfully considered. A vision is vouchsafed to us by Providence. A commercial Xtian. My first razor.

I HAVE frequently been asked, and I have but little doubt that hosts of my readers will put the same query to me, why I did not, after such an experience, transfer my attendance to another school. And I ought to say at once, perhaps, that both my father and myself were strongly disposed to this course. Having regard to the facts, however, that Hopkinson House School was the only one in the neighbourhood for sons of gentlemen; that my moral position had now been defined there beyond any possibility of doubt; that the apologies elicited would probably secure me in the future from any further corporal interference; and that both Simeon and Silas Whey had expressed their horror at my treatment—in view of these facts, we came to the conclusion that, for the present at any rate, I had better remain there. That it could never be the same to me was of

course the case. But then my hopes had not been extravagant. And although, as I have indicated, my boyhood had been ruthlessly plucked from me like a geranium in full bud, my early young manhood found me securer than ever in the approval of a wise and discerning Providence. Apart from an occasional boil, too, and a somewhat intractable and disfiguring affection known as acne, my health was giving rise to less anxiety than for some time past, and I have always looked back on the next two years as amongst the happiest of my life.

Necessarily thrown, as the result of what had happened, very largely upon my own resources, I was agreeably surprised to find that these were even richer and more varied than I had supposed; and I frequently walked, on a Saturday afternoon, as far as Dulwich or Blackheath, thoroughly contented with the company of none other than myself. What was my joy, too, to discover, a couple of weeks after my fifteenth birthday, that my voice had broken into a full-toned bass that promised to be even more powerful than my father's; and many a long hour did we spend at the harmonium together in friendly competition over our favourite hymns. Though he was rather more accurate than myself in the matter of tune, in the matter of time there was

little to choose between us, while in the actual volume of sound produced I was soon my father's equal, if not his superior.

Nor was singing our only mutual occupation, for once a month, thanks to my father's generosity, we would journey to such a place of instructional interest as the Tower of London or Sir John Soane's Museum. We even visited, I remember, the National Gallery of Art, with its remarkable collection of hand-painted pictures; and I can still recall the delicacy with which my father would intervene to shelter me from any that contained an undraped female figure.

Perhaps our happiest times, however, were those spent with Nature during my father's annual fortnight's holiday, when we would usually procure lodgings at some such salubrious resort as Clacton-on-Sea or Cliftonville, near Margate. Here we would abandon ourselves to the contemplation of the waves, and here, under my father's skilful tuition, I became quite an adept at an entrancing pursuit less well known, I think, than it should be.

Consisting in the first place of the selection of a flat-shaped stone—itself often a gleeful and difficult task—it then becomes the object of the participators in the game to propel this seawards across the surface of the ocean. Being

heavier than water, it would naturally be supposed that at the first impact with the latter the stone would sink; and indeed, if projected by an unskilled player, this is what usually eventuates. As I was happy to demonstrate, however, to our Sunday School mistresses only last year at South-end, in the hands of a careful and experienced performer this is by no means necessarily the case. Supporting the stone, with its flatter surface downwards, on the flexed middle finger of the thrower's hand, his (or her) fore-finger should lie along its circumference, the thumb gently resting on its superior surface. It should then be so cast as to travel horizontally, its flat surface parallel to the surface of the water, with the surprising result that, when at last it drops, it bounces into the air again and proceeds onwards. Nay, it may even, in the hands of the most expert, repeat this process two or three times, to the intense and delighted fascination of those who have been privileged to witness him.

Not lacking in the element of competition, yet devoid of all possibility of personal danger, affording healthful exercise, but at the same time immune from the perils of over-exertion, it has always seemed strange to me that, up to the present, it has played so small a part in our national life. An island community, here if any-

where is a diversion that should surely appeal to us; and I for one should rejoice to see the day when, instead of the football ground and the tennis pitch, our coasts should be thronged with eager young men and women enjoying this hygienic and innocent pastime.

Nor did we confine ourselves, while at the seaside, merely to terrestrial amusement, and we would frequently indulge, for perhaps a quarter of an hour, in the enjoyable practice of pedal immersion. Wholly precluded, of course, for constitutional reasons, from the fuller development of this art involved in swimming, we nevertheless found this to be a most laughable and even exciting occupation; and I can recall at least two occasions when, owing to a momentary inadvertence, our rolled-up trousers became partially submerged. A smart run home, however, a cup of hot milk, and immediate retirement to bed sufficed, in both instances, to protect us from any untoward results.

With my two friends, also, Simeon and Silas Whey, I had many hours of fruitful companionship. Equally segregated with myself from the majority of their schoolfellows, though less upon moral and intellectual than purely physical grounds, they were yet earnest and high-minded lads with many notably endearing qualities.

Reticent to an extreme, partly, in the case of Silas, owing to an initial difficulty in articulating anything at all, and in the case of Simeon, owing to a kind of laryngeal click from which he is still unfortunately a sufferer, they appeared to find a comfort in my own natural eloquence that I was only too glad to bestow upon them. In return for this, their ample pocket-money was always entirely at my disposal, and many a pound of toffee and Turkish delight was I able to enjoy at their expense. Like myself unaddicted to athletics, and thereby preserved from its associated vices, they would saunter for hours with me discussing some favourite Bible character or humming in unison some well-known hymn; and we were further united, if that were possible, in our eventual confirmation by the self-same Bishop.

Nevertheless, as I have said, it was chiefly upon myself that I had to depend for company; and in my walks abroad, my studies of the shop-windows, and my exploration of the neighbouring churches, my closest comrade was myself, and I can honestly say that I have never regretted it. Nor must it be supposed that the hours so spent were entirely devoid of legitimate adventure. On two or three occasions, for instance, I was abruptly addressed by some surprised or

suspicious verger, and once, owing to ignorance of its usual closing hours, I was incarcerated in a local cemetery. Confined by railings too lofty to scale and too narrowly approximated to permit egress, for a few moments the prospects were sufficiently black to cause a sensible quickening of my pulse. A felicitous remark, however, addressed to an under-gardener, secured my exit by a private gate, and I hurried home, not without relief, but none the worse for my little mischance.

Nor shall I forget the thrill, perhaps a trifle guilty, with which I discovered, soon after I was sixteen, how to descend from a vehicle in motion without the sacrifice of an erect position. Hitherto, like my father, when travelling by tram or omnibus, I had always insisted upon complete immobility prior both to entrance into and departure from one of these public conveyances; and many a conductor had been reported by us both for failing to secure the requisite lack of motion. Upon my sixteenth birthday, however, perceiving that the omnibus in which I was journeying could not be brought to a standstill at the desired position, I decided to alight from it notwithstanding and boldly descended from its posterior step.

Naturally leaving this at right angles, what

was my rather rueful amazement to discover myself, in the next instant, lying upon my side in the roadway. At first I imagined that I must have stepped upon something slippery or that some such article must have been adhering to my footwear. But a minute examination both of this and the roadway failed to reveal any such cause. Completely baffled, I made a second attempt, but with an equally discomfiting result, and time after time, in spite of my utmost efforts, I was the victim of a similar loss of equilibrium. Many a less determined and timider lad would indeed have given up the venture, and again I ought to confess, perhaps, in view of municipal regulations, that my pertinacity was not wholly defensible.

Robbed of candour, however, such a record as the present would lose the greater part of its spiritual value; and while I am prepared to admit that, in this particular instance, my youthful conduct may have been open to misjudgment, I cannot concede that it was in any degree incompatible with the highest expression of the Xtian character. Refusing to be cast down, therefore, save in the most literal sense. I continued dauntlessly with my efforts, to be rewarded at last with a final success no less gratifying than entire. Failing to remain upright in departing from the

moving vehicle either at right angles to it or with my back towards the driver, I found that by *facing in the same direction* I could not only descend from it with greater immunity, but that by *running after it*, as it were, for two or three steps, I could do so with complete integrity. Needless to say, having acquired this knowledge, I only made use of it in an occasional emergency, and for some years now, owing to declining success, I have discontinued the practice altogether.

With the unfolding of my seventeenth year, however, I was definitely approaching the great problems of adult life, and much of my time now began to be occupied with the contemplation of my future career. Thanks to the tempered foresight of my father, a firm believer, as a rule, in unlimited families, in the exceptional circumstances of his own case he had refrained from further parentage. On his demise, therefore, as he had given me to understand, I should inherit some two thousand pounds, this being the amount to which his insurance and savings would by then probably have accrued. Should my mother survive him, I should, of course, be expected, and would gladly, as I assured him, make her some allowance. But her health was so precarious as to render this sacrifice a very improbable necessity.

Devoid of anxiety, therefore, as to ultimate no less than immediate penury, I could afford to regard the future with an adequate deliberation, and I need scarcely say, perhaps, that the Church of England was the subject of my first and most prolonged consideration. Financially inadequate as were even its highest rewards, I was yet so adapted to its every need that both my father and myself would have been willing to overlook this very serious disadvantage. But to become ordained presupposed an examination, and I had been seriously handicapped in this particular respect by a proven disability, probably hereditary in origin, to demonstrate my culture in so confined a form.

For a similar reason, even had I been attracted to it, the profession of Medicine would have been unavailable, while from that of the Law, nobler in every way, I was equally precluded. For some time, however, we canvassed very carefully the strong claims of Diplomacy, for which in many ways, as my father agreed with me, I was most admirably fitted. And I am still convinced that both as attaché and ambassador I should have found congenial and Xtian employment. Unhappily, however, such a career involved the acquirement of the French language, with attendant dangers, to which my father could

not persuade himself to expose me. Whether he was right in this is perhaps open to argument, and I have since met several apparently devout men who have not only spoken this tongue with reported fluency, but have deliberately sojourned in the country of its origin. Personally, however, while reluctant to condemn them, I must confess to sharing my father's views, and I am happy in the knowledge that the vicar of my parish holds precisely the same opinion. Abandoning Diplomacy, therefore, we considered the Consolidated Water Board, in which my father, of course, had considerable influence. But here, as in the Church of England, the emoluments were unsatisfactory, while the spiritual opportunities, of course, were far more restricted.

Thus step by step, as though by the hand of Providence — and indeed, as my father said, it could have been by no other hand — we were slowly led to the conclusion that in some branch of Commerce lay my future destiny. Requiring no previous examinations, with liberal, nay, illimitable, monetary possibilities, this was the field—the highest, perhaps, of all—that was now unfolded before our gaze. For a few moments, I remember, we sat there speechless, one on each side of the parlour table. Then my father rose and stood for another few moments with his right

hand resting on the harmonium. In his face there was a great joy, not unmixed with solemnity. His eyes looked beyond me out towards eternity. Indeed it was to eternity that he addressed himself.

"Augustus," he said, "my son Augustus—a Xtian tradesman, preferably wholesale."

My mother came in to announce the supper. But almost impatiently he motioned her aside.

"Oh, can't you see," he cried, "that we're standing on Pisgah?"

For a moment, not comprehending him, she stared at his feet. Then very softly she withdrew, and he came toward me with outstretched hands.

"A Xtian magnate," he said, "a commercial Xtian—what better could I have desired for you?"

Impulsively I kissed him, perhaps a little too impulsively. But he scarcely flinched as he received the impact, merely remarking that, upon the next day, he would present me with my first razor. Nor did he fail to do so, partly reminded by myself, and partly by the appearance, early the next morning, of a slight but painful urticaria or nettle-rash in the region of our most vehement facial adjustment. But that

was a penalty, as he several times assured me, that many a father would have been glad to pay, and one that yielded, in less than a fortnight, to an inunction embracing the oxide of zinc.

CHAPTER VII

A further vision is vouchsafed to us by Providence. Mr. Chrysostom Lorton and the sources of his wealth. The debt owed to me by Mr. Septimus Lorton. Interview with Mr. and Mrs. Septimus Lorton. Mr. Septimus Lorton's disgraceful attitude. My father is compelled to be frank with him. What I discovered in Greenwich Park.

MANIFESTLY as it had been Providence that had thus revealed to us the general sphere of my future activities, it was no less clearly the same beneficent Agency that determined their actual channel; and it has always seemed to me peculiarly appropriate that the particular enterprise with which I was to be first connected should have been suggested to my father during the process of family prayers.

This took place, according to our usual custom, immediately after the conclusion of our evening meal, and consisted of the singing by my father and myself of two or three hymns or sacred choruses, followed by the reading on the part of my father of a chapter of Holy Scripture, the whole being concluded by one of those extemporary prayers in the composition of which my father was so skilled. For the purposes of the Scripture reading the volume generally used

was a large Bible inherited by my father, but on the evening in question, owing to an accident with some stewed fruit, this was absent at a neighbouring bookbinder's. My father had therefore borrowed with my glad permission my copy of the Lorton Bible for School, and it was in opening this that he caught sight of the words "eighteenth edition" on the first page.

That something had perturbed him was instantly apparent both to my mother and myself, not only on account of the sudden tremor that became visible in his left hand, but of the extraordinary rapidity with which he read the appointed chapter, and the verbal errors that consequently ensued. His subsequent prayer, too, was so brief that we were scarcely upon our knees before he had leapt to his feet again, and my mother and myself, indeed, were still kneeling when he began to expound the idea that had been vouchsafed to him.

"I have it," he cried. "It's just been sent to me. Chrysostom Lorton. That's the man. Eighteen editions—that's what his Bible's gone into, and none of the authors with any royalty rights!"

Nor was that all, for in addition, as I have said, to being the elder brother of Mr. Septimus Lorton, he was not only the proprietor of the well-known

Beulah, perhaps the most popular of weekly religious journals, but his *Peeping Up Series for Children*, devotional stories with coloured illustrations, were familiar objects upon the nursery book-shelves of every evangelical household. Moreover, he was the medium through which were issued to the world many millions of hortatory pamphlets, while the counters of his show-room in Paternoster Row were heaped with every kind of Protestant literature.

Such, then, was the man and such the undertaking, not only Xtian, but lucrative, that by a chance gesture, or so it might have seemed, now stood beckoning before us; and it was only necessary, as my father justly said, for his brother Septimus to do the rest. But would he? I was at first doubtful. A weak man, he was also inert. And it did not, of course, follow that because he used his brother's Bible he was on intimate or influential terms with him. This much was clear, however, that as the oldest pupil in his school, and in view of the treatment that I had received from his subordinates, he was under an obligation to me that neither my father nor myself could morally allow ourselves to remit. And although for reasons that I have already mentioned I had not advanced from my original class, in the strictly ethical sense, by his own

admission, I was *facile princeps*.*

"A good boy," said Mr. Lorton, "a very, very good boy, or shall we say, now that he has begun to shave, an extremely admirable young man."

This was upon the next evening, the penultimate evening of my last term at school, when both my father and myself were sitting in Mr. Lorton's study for the purpose indicated above.

"It is useless to deny, of course," my father had said, "that we have been seriously disappointed in your school, or to suggest that either my son or myself will be able to look back upon it with approval. Nor can I profess to be wholly convinced as to the necessity that you have so often explained to me of promoting your pupils from class to class according to the results of an examination. At the same time I am open-minded enough to recognize that this method has the sanction of custom, and to forbear from arraigning you for the consequently meagre position that my son still occupies in your establishment. Refusing to accept the standard, I can afford to ignore its results. But of this, Mr. Lorton, I am completely confident—that if the index had been a moral or religious one, my boy Augustus would have been second to none."

Here my father paused for a moment to

* Easily first.

expectorate some phlegm, and it was then that Mr. Lorton used the words I have quoted.

"A good boy," he said, as his wife entered the room, "a very, very good boy, or shall we say, now that he has begun to shave, an extremely admirable young man."

A heavily-constructed woman of immense height, with prominent cheek-bones and a bovine chin, it was generally understood that Mr. Lorton had selected her chiefly on account of her income. And neither my father nor myself had ever been able to detect in her the least sign of intelligence. Happily her intrusion, however, was but momentary, and my father was able once more to proceed.

"I am obliged to you for your tribute," he said, "and if, as you must surely admit, my son's influence in your school has been inestimable, you will the more readily agree with me in adopting a reciprocal attitude towards the important question of his future employment."

As we both observed, Mr. Lorton's expression changed a little. But his voice retained its professional amiability.

"Oh, precisely," he said, "precisely, although you must understand, of course, that my influence is strictly limited."

"Nevertheless," said my father, "I am depend-

ing on its exertion to the utmost boundary of its capacity. And I should be glad to learn what openings you have in view for one to whom so admittedly you are a debtor."

At this point Mrs. Lorton returned and took up a position on her husband's left flank. Mr. Lorton glanced at her before replying.

"Well, of course," he said, "the problem is a somewhat difficult one."

"It would be easier," said Mrs. Lorton, "if we were an employment agency."

My father bowed.

"That I fully appreciate," he said. "But I may at least assume, I trust, that you have considered the problem."

"Oh, deeply," said Mr. Lorton, "very deeply, in fact I ought to say, perhaps, profoundly."

My father leaned back, folding his arms.

"Then may I inquire," he asked, "with what result?"

Again Mr. Lorton glanced at his wife. But her slab-like face remained unstirred.

"Well, I can hardly say," he replied, "that as yet—er—we have come to a definite conclusion. The moral qualities, you see though extremely valuable——"

"For ultimate salvation," said my father, "they are essential."

"Oh, of course," said Mr. Lorton, "of course. But in the meantime, you know, and taken by themselves——" He paused for a moment, and then his face brightened. "Have you ever thought," he said, "of making your son a missionary?"

A sort of sigh emanated from his wife.

"In a warm country," she said, "a long way off?"

Mr. Lorton nodded.

"Healthy but remote," he said, "where his moral enthusiasm could have full play?"

"And where his personal appearance," said Mrs. Lorton, "could scarcely fail to be such a protection to him?"

"Quite so," said Mr. Lorton. "I can conceive of no one eating dear Augustus."

Mrs. Lorton smiled not unkindly.

"No one at all," she said, "not even the most debased."

Afterwards, as we discovered, these remarks lacked sincerity. But for the moment we were not ungrateful. Colouring with pleasure my father lifted his hand.

"I am again obliged to you," he said, "for your tribute."

Mr. Lorton rose to his feet, evidently under the impression that the interview had ended.

"Oh, not at all," he said, "not at all, we are only too happy to have been of any assistance."

He moved towards the door. But my father motioned him back. Somewhat less agreeably, I thought, he sat down again. Allowing him a moment for this, my father then proceeded.

"Sensible as I am," he said, "both of the justice, and I may say discernment, of your suggestion, neither on financial nor hygienic grounds am I able to entertain it; and indeed in its main outlines the province of my son's future has already been delineated for us. Second to none in my admiration of the noble calling to which you have referred, surely they are nobler who have created the means by which our missionaries subsist, and who, of the wealth that their efforts have amassed, continue to support these emissaries of religion. It is therefore to Commerce that my son has been called, but in his first introduction to this sacred field, we have only thought it right to afford you the opportunity of being the possible instrument of Providence."

"I see," said Mr. Lorton. "That is very kind of you."

"Take away the number," said his wife, "that you first thought of."

My father stared at her. But she appeared to

be in a kind of stupor, and it seemed more merciful to avert his eyes.

"It has, in fact, occurred to us," he said, "or rather to me—for it was to me personally that the idea was vouchsafed—that your brother Chrysostom would be glad to hear that my son's services were now available."

For two or three moments Mr. Lorton seemed to struggle for breath. Then he made a meaningless sound like that of a small animal.

"My brother C—Chrysostom?" he said at last. "But in what capacity would you propose to offer your son?"

My father smiled somewhat dryly.

"I should hardly have thought offer," he said, "was the right word."

Mrs. Lorton looked at her husband.

"He means that dear Augustus," she said, "would allow Chrysostom to approach him."

"Provided," said my father, "that he gave sufficient assurances. Of course we should look forward to an eventual partnership."

"And not to succession?" asked Mrs. Lorton.

"Only in the event," said my father, "of Mr. Chrysostom's decease."

Mr. Lorton wiped his forehead.

"That's most considerate," he said, "most considerate."

"Then perhaps I can rely," said my father, "on your taking immediate steps to arrange an interview for us with your brother."

But Mr. Lorton shook his head.

"I'm very sorry," he replied. "But that's quite impossible. For, in the first place, my brother's business is a very complicated and peculiar one, and in the second I regret to say that I have absolutely no influence with him. In fact—er—well, to tell the truth, any testimonial from me would be worse than useless."

"Oh, worse," said Mrs. Lorton, "much worse. And besides, he has no vacancies."

For perhaps a quarter of a minute there was a dead silence, and then very slowly my father rose to his feet.

"So I am to understand," he said, "that you entirely refuse to approach your brother on my son's behalf?"

With a pitiable gesture Mr. Lorton shrugged his shoulders, and the clock on the mantelpiece made an insolent crowing noise. Trembling, but composed, my father swept it to the floor together with several of its adjacent ornaments. Then very quietly, but with increasing emphasis, he began to address Mr. Lorton. It was a painful task. It is always a painful task to confront such a character with its own portrait. But it was a

duty from which, I am proud to say, I never knew my father to shrink. Nor did he cease, on the present occasion, until the last iota of it had been discharged, though such, as I have shown, was his verbal economy that this was completed in fifteen minutes. Then with his hand resting upon my shoulder, for he was still the taller by two and a half inches, we turned our backs, as we thought for ever, upon Mr. and Mrs. Septimus Lorton.

I have said for ever. But though, as the event proved, this was a misjudgment on both our parts, it must not be assumed that either my father or myself had lost his self-confidence. For the moment, it was true, the path seemed obstructed, the vision obscured, the end denied. But neither of us doubted that, by means yet unrevealed, I should be brought at last to the destined haven, although, as I must admit, neither of us foresaw the tremendous speed with which this would be accomplished.

Such was the case, however, for when brooding alone, upon the very next evening, in Greenwich Park, a familiar voice pierced my consciousness and suddenly awakened my every faculty. It was a warm but cloudy April dusk, and I was sitting upon a seat under a large chestnut tree, when I began to hear again, to my disgust and

astonishment, the detested voice of Mr. Septimus Lorton. Rapidly withdrawing myself behind the tree, I then observed him to be approaching my seat, evidently engrossed in his conversation with a medium-sized female who was accompanying him. For a moment, as was only natural, I resolved to transport myself as far as possible from his neighbourhood. But by some impulse—I realize now, of course, that this could only have had one origin—I merely performed perhaps a quarter of a revolution round the commanding trunk of the chestnut tree. By this manœuvre, not, I think, uningenious, I thus concealed myself from his vision, while at the same time conferring upon myself such possible advantages as might accrue from observation. Nor was the event to prove me unjustified. For hardly had he arrived at the seat that I had vacated when he proceeded, accompanied by his companion, himself to sit down upon it.

Being a slow runner my position now was one of the extremest peril, and in the events of detection, I could only have relied upon my happily exceptional vocal powers. But a closer inspection of Mr. Lorton's companion and something in the tones in which he was addressing her combined in bidding me hold my ground entirely regardless of personal danger. Indeed from the begin-

ning, I think, it was less the physical than the moral contingencies that disturbed me. For I had instantly recognized, to my profound discomfort, that the person accompanying him *was not Mrs. Septimus Lorton*. A woman of much slenderer and more graceful build, she had a pink complexion and hazel eyes, with a rather large but conceivably alluring mouth, and a considerable quantity of yellowish hair. Her name, it appeared, was Nina, the i being pronounced as if it were an e, and it was quickly apparent to me that, for the first time, I was in the presence of the gravest human voice. Nor have I ever, perhaps, entirely recovered from the enormous shock of that discovery. For though I had been aware, of course, from my studies of Holy Scripture, that such things had occurred in the Middle East, and had even deduced from contemporary newspapers their occasional survival in the British Islands, I had never dreamed it possible that here, in a public park in the Xtian London of my own experience, a married man could thus openly sit with his arm round a female who was not his wife.

Trembling all over, I was afraid for two or three moments that I was about to relapse into unconsciousness, and that I did not do so I can only attribute to the amazing discovery that

followed. For no sooner had Mr. Lorton taken his seat than the petrifying fact became manifest that his fellow-criminal was not only married herself, but *was actually the wife of his brother Chrysostom*.^{*} Afterwards, as was inevitable perhaps, I utterly broke down, but not until I had made full notes of their conversation, learned that Mrs. Chrysostom was supposed to be out shopping, and observed them kiss one another several times. Then, pale and distraught, blinded with tears, and scarcely indeed able to suppress my sobs, I hurried home, and within less than an hour had buried my face in my father's waistcoat.

"Oh, father," I cried, "father," and though he had misinterpreted my convulsions, I shall never forget the tenderness with which he signalled to my mother to fetch a basin as quickly as possible. Nor was he less sympathetic when I had succeeded in convincing him that my paroxysms were spiritual rather than gastric, for smoothing my hair with his unoccupied hand, he at once readjusted my head to its former position.

"My poor boy," he said, "my poor Augustus. Tell me what's happened. Take your time. There, there now. I've sent your mother away. But she's left the basin here in case."

^{*}I am happy to say that this pernicious family is now completely extinct.

"Oh, sin," I cried, "sin—unbelievable sin in Greenwich Park."

I felt my father's abdomen give a violent heave.

"In Greenwich Park?" he said. "Never?"

"Oh, yes," I cried, "yes. Would that it were no. But it was not no."

My father bent over me, patting my head.

"My poor boy," he said. "What sort of sin?"

"Oh, the worst," I said, "the worst. It was Mr. Lorton and Mrs. Chrysostom."

"Good Heavens," said my father, "Mr. Lorton?"

"Mr. Septimus," I said, "and Mrs. Chrysostom."

"But what were they doing?" asked my father.

Burning all over, I replied that they had been kissing.

"Kissing," he said, "kissing? You mean to tell me you saw them kissing?"

"Oh, father," I said, "several times, with mutual expressions of passionate regard."

I had now reared my head from the lower part of his waistcoat, and it would have been hard to say which of us was the deeper scarlet. Then my father covered his eyes.

"Mutual expressions?" he whispered. "Do you remember them?"

With a shaking hand I offered him my pocket-book.

"They are there," I said. "I wrote them down."

Like a tornado he tore them from my grasp.

"My darling," he read. "Oh, Septimus. Give me another. Well, just one. My only darling. Light of my heart. Do you know what your lips are like? No, tell me."

Then a great light shone in my father's eyes.

"Providence has delivered them," he said, "into our hands."

For a moment I was silent. Then I rose to my feet.

"I had rather thought," I said, "that might be the case."

"Oh, it is," said my father. "It is. Do you remember those beautiful words of David's, 'the righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance: he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked'?"

"Not only do I remember them," I said, "but had you not quoted them, I should certainly have done so myself."

"We'll wash them to-night," said my father. "Put on your cap. No, it would perhaps be better to wear your bowler," and five minutes later we were standing once more on the front-door step of Hopkinson House.

CHAPTER VIII

Second interview with Mr. Septimus Lorton. But now the tables are turned. A pitiful exhibition. My father demands guarantees. He will write a letter to Mrs. Chrysostom Lorton. My father's ordeal. When it was dark.

SAVE that it became the means so strangely selected for my early entrance into Xtian commerce, I do not propose to linger over the comparatively brief but effective interview that ensued. At first refused admission, the words Greenwich Park sent as a message by the servant sufficed to bring Mr. Lorton hastily but reluctantly and unaccompanied to the front door. From there he conveyed us to one of the smaller and more distant schoolrooms, and it soon became obvious, in spite of his tentative denials, and even more despicable evasions, that my father and myself were the complete masters of the situation. It was true, of course, that he tried to temporize with the pathetic bravado of the exposed sinner.

"But even if it were the case," he said, "which I am not prepared to admit, that I was in Greenwich Park with Mrs. Chrysostom, do you

suppose that, were I to deny it, my brother would believe you for a moment?"

Fulfilled as he was with a Xtian indignation, my father was unable to suppress a smile.

"I imagine that at least," he said, "he would be interested in my son's knowledge that she was supposed to be shopping in Kensington."

Mr. Septimus Lorton protruded the tip of his tongue in a vain endeavour to moisten his lips.

"And he would also be interested," I said, "to meet the lame newspaper-seller from whom she obtained change for ten shillings."

My father nodded.

"That cannot often happen," he said, "and my son tells me that the man picked up one of her gloves."

"Yes," I said, "and followed her into the station with it, where she gave him a sixpence, and he called her a pretty lady."

My father looked thoughtfully at the tips of his fingers.

"From which I infer," he said, "that he could probably identify her."

Mr. Lorton passed one of his hands over the pale green surface of his cheek.

"But, my dear sir," he said, "my dear sir, even suppose, I say, that without—er—prejudice, Mrs. Chrysostom had so far honoured

me as to accompany me for a walk in the park you mention, surely that is not necessarily an indiscreet act in view of the fact that I am her husband's brother."

Again my father smiled.

"But a brother, you must remember, whose testimonial would be worse than useless."

For a moment Mr. Lorton glanced from side to side with the bestial expression of a hunted rat. Then he spoke huskily, after licking his lips again and listening for a second or two over his left shoulder.

"Perhaps I was rather hasty," he said, "rather hasty. In fact, I had—er—already begun to reconsider that."

"I am happy to hear it," said my father.

"In fact," said Mr. Lorton, "I think something could be done."

My father bowed again. He was no longer smiling. I had seldom, indeed, seen him look so grave.

"For the sake of your school," he said, "to say nothing of your soul, and for the sake of your brother's business, I sincerely hope so."

"Oh, I think so," said Mr. Lorton, "I think so. Now, let me see. How could I be most helpful?"

My father cleared his throat.

"Deeply as I am inclined," he said, "to expose this iniquity to the uttermost, and irreparable as has been its injury to my son's sensibilities, I am yet prepared to concede you the opportunity of retaining at least the semblance of your good name. But for my son I must claim every guarantee. Upon my son's future your own is dependent."

I dare not record that Mr. Lorton smiled. Let me rather say that he exposed his incisors.

"Dear Augustus," he said, "I'm sure he'll succeed. I'll send a line to my brother's wife."

My father's expression never changed.

"Do you apprehend then," he inquired, "that she can secure him the requisite position?"

"Far more probably," said Mr. Lorton, "than I. My—er—Mr. Chrysostom Lorton is deeply attached to her."

My father's silence was perhaps more eloquent than any merely verbal condemnation.

"I—er—I'll write to-night," said Mr. Lorton.

"Perhaps," said my father, "you'd be so kind as to give us Mrs. Chrysostom Lorton's address."

Mr. Lorton hesitated.

"Oh—er—certainly," he said. "Paternoster Towers, Enfield."

My father made a note of this in his diary.

"We shall call upon her," he said, "to-morrow at noon."

Mr. Lorton emitted a sort of gargling sound.

"I—er—I'll tell her," he said. "She'll be delighted."

Strong in the Lord, therefore, and indeed in comparatively good spirits considering the vileness with which we had been brought into contact, we returned home to a belated but none the less substantial meal; and it was not until this had been absorbed and my mother was in the scullery, cleansing the dishes that had contained it, that my father referred again to the interview that had been arranged for the following day.

"Although it seemed wise," he said, "to suggest to that creature that both you and I would be present at it, I am afraid that my obligations to the Consolidated Water Board will, in reality, prevent me from being there, and that you must be prepared therefore, my dear Augustus, to face that female alone."

I bowed my head.

"I pray that you may trust me," I said.

With a slightly increased colour my father rose to his feet.

"I have no doubt of it," he said. "But at the same time—at the same time—oh, Augustus, Augustus!"

Deeply moved, he advanced two or three paces and leaned heavily against the harmonium.

"You see, my boy," he continued—at what a cost I could only afterward guess—"with this interview you will be definitely entering upon a new and most perilous phase of experience. For the first time—I must ask you to turn down the lamp—for the first time, as a marriageable adult, you will be called upon to encounter, face to face, a woman of fierce and unbridled passions."

Here he paused for a moment and I could feel the floor shaking.

"Oh, father," I cried. "Can I not spare you?"

"No, no," he said. "I must see it through."

I bent forward to steady the lamp, and at the same time I turned it lower.

"Mind the wick," he said.

"Oh, father," I cried, "do you mean that she may want to kiss me?"

"Oh, Augustus," he said, "or even more."

"Oh, father," I cried. "Is there anything more?"

He swallowed once or twice.

"Oh, Augustus," he said.

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I fear this chapter must remain unfinished.

CHAPTER IX

Effect upon my father of his disclosure. My Xtian confidence in journeying to Enfield. Paternoster Towers and its mistress. Unfortunate detachment of my posterior trouser-buttons. Triumphant success of my interview. A kindly parlourmaid and her male friend. I secure a position under Mr. Chrysostom Lorton. Melancholy death of Silas Whey.

PROFOUNDLY, and indeed permanently, as it had shaken him—when I turned up the lamp again my father was an old man—I cannot say that the substance of his communication was entirely unfamiliar to me, or that I had not been aware, to a certain extent, of a new significance attaching to my person. Appreciably over five feet in height, with a pectoral girth of twenty-six inches, my abdominal measurement (fully clothed of course) was but little less than a yard, and for some time I had been unable to help noticing that I was not unattractive to the opposite sex. I had, in fact, deemed it advisable to inform Emily Smith, who, as I have said, was somewhat my senior, that while I was still agreeable to remain her companion, there could be no question between us of ultimate matrimony; and I had several times discussed with Simeon and Silas Whey the qualities

to be demanded from a possible wife.

Even had I not been fortified, therefore, with the details, imparted at such a price to me by my father, I should not have felt myself wholly unequipped in confronting Mrs. Chrysostom Lorton; and, as it was, I made the journey to Enfield serene in the knowledge of my instructed manhood. This was the more fortunate in that, devoid of anxiety, I was enabled to profit very fully from an expedition considerably the most involved that I had ever engaged upon unaccompanied.

Nothing would have been easier, for instance, than, dazed by its magnitude, to have wandered for hours in Liverpool Street Station, whereas a few courteous and clearly-phrased questions soon led my footsteps to the appropriate platform. Similarly, had I been engrossed with a fearful apprehension of the ordeal that awaited me, I might have been blind to the interesting objects that presented themselves to my carriage window; whereas I was moved to pity and apprehension by the rough streets of Bethnal Green, pricked to audible curiosity by the uncommon nomenclature of Seven Sisters, agreeably reminded, at Bruce Grove, of the well-known Caledonian monarch, and so overcome by mirth, as we drew into Lower Edmonton, at a sudden recollection of John

Gilpin that an elderly female who was sitting opposite me hastily left the compartment.

I was able to observe, too, with satisfaction, the busy and prosperous aspect of Enfield, and although, as I drew near to the mansion of Mr. Chrysostom Lorton, I was naturally a little sobered by the imminence of my task, I was gratified to perceive in Paternoster Towers a concrete testimony to the worth of his enterprise. Solidly constructed of red brick and surrounded by well-trimmed lawns and flower-beds, it was further adhered to by a couple of large conservatories and approached by a broad, gravelled drive. Nor was I less satisfied by the humble and respectful demeanour of the good-looking parlourmaid who opened the door, and who had proceeded, having taken my hat and stick, to admit me to her mistress's boudoir.

"Mrs. Lorton," she said, "will be down in a minute."

"I thank you," I replied. "I will await her arrival."

Favourably as I had been impressed, however, it must not be assumed that I had in any degree relaxed my guard; and though I was aware, of course, that I held every advantage I made a rapid survey of the contents of the room.

Of no great size, it had evidently been furnished

to minister almost entirely to the senses, and it was perhaps not surprising that I was unable to discern a single text upon its walls. Upon a parquet floor polished to a degree that was almost lascivious in its smoothness, elaborate table-legs stood reflected and a voluptuous rug or two solicited the feet. Upon the mantelpiece stood an oval mirror, indecently surrounded by likenesses of Cupid, and beside it a nude female, fashioned in bronze, was extracting a thorn from her left calf. Flushing involuntarily, I turned away from these only to observe upon a French-looking writing-table a large photograph of an elderly man, pathetically signed "Your aff. Chrysostom." Beneath this, in a confusion that was probably characteristic, lay a half-finished letter to somebody called Loo-Loo and several others addressed to "Dearest Nina" that I did not hesitate to peruse. Most of these, as I discovered, were but little more than the vapid productions of obvious worldlings. But two were invitations to card parties and one, to my horror, contained the word "blasted."

This was the one, indeed, upon which I was engaged when the door of the room was abruptly thrown open with a lack of refinement that I ought perhaps to have expected, but that for a moment completely unnerved me. In fact, it did

more. For in the effort to recover myself the rug upon which I was standing slid across the floor, leaving behind it not only the upper and middle but the lower middle portions of my frame. Poised in mid-air, my feet having accompanied the rug, I was entirely unable to support these, and was obliged in consequence to assume with the extremest suddenness a sedentary position upon the parquet. Nor was that all. For when, at the third attempt, I succeeded in once more standing upright, the left of my two posterior trouser-buttons fell with a sharp metallic sound upon the floor. Here it paused for a moment, and then standing upon its circumference followed the rug in the direction of Mrs. Lorton.

"Dear me," she said, "I'm afraid I interrupted you. Is this your button?"

She stooped and picked it up.

With a supreme effort, and despite the most poignant anguish, I regained command of myself and requested her to return it. Hardly had she done so, however, when there came a second metallic sound, and the comrade of the first button also rolled to her feet.

"Oh, dear," she said, "isn't that the other one? What do you suppose will happen now?"

Only those who have experienced the extreme discomfort of the simultaneous loss of both

posterior trouser-buttons, and the consequent approach to the back of the neck of the bifurcation-point of the braces, will be able to appreciate the enormous handicap under which Providence had now seen fit to place me. In the manual effort, too, which became instantly necessary to prevent the downward corrugation of my trousers, the first button slipped from my grasp and again bounced upon the parquet.

"Oh, I say," said Mrs. Lorton, "is this a new kind of game, or are you trying to put me at my ease?"

With a silent but powerful petition, I drew myself as erect as the circumstances permitted.

"It is neither a game," I said, holding up my trousers, "nor am I entering into personal relations with you. In fact, it is my duty to make it quite clear to you that you are no sort of temptation to me."

Clad in some close-fitting fabric that exuded a most licentious scent, I could see at once that these well-chosen words had had a profound and immediate effect upon her. Turning her back on me, she emitted a hoarse gasp, and then collapsing upon the sofa, she lay there choking and convulsed in what appeared to be an attack of acute hysteria. Startled but unmoved, and still sustaining my trousers, I gravely awaited her recovery.

"Oh dear," she said, wiping her eyes, and then after looking at me again, she collapsed once more. Then she sat up, fanning herself with her handkerchief.

"You must really forgive me," she said, "but you looked so stern."

"I should scarcely have thought," I replied, inclining my head a little, "that as a Xtian gentleman you could have expected me to look otherwise."

"Oh no," she said, "no, of course not. Just suppose—oh dear, oh dear."

Then she wiped her eyes again.

"Wouldn't you be better sitting down?" she asked.

"I thank you," I said. "But I prefer to stand."

She folded up her handkerchief and placed it in a small bag.

"Well, you know best," she said. "What do you want me to do?"

"I had imagined," I said, "that that had already been indicated to you by your fellow-accomplice, Mr. Septimus Lorton."

"I say," she replied, "you do use long words. Aren't you considered to be frightfully clever?"

I bowed again.

"In my own circle," I said, "I am not con-

sidered, I believe, to be unintelligent."

"And so you want Chrys," she said, "to give you a job?"

"You are doubtless aware," I replied, "of the alternative."

"You mean if he doesn't," she said, "you'll tell him about me and Septimus."

"As a Xtian gentleman," I said, "it would become my duty."

"I wonder what he'd say," she said. "When do you want to see him?"

"The sooner the better," I said. "I should prefer this afternoon."

She rose to her feet.

"Then I'll have to write him a note," she said. "But it'll never do to mention poor Septimus."

She crossed to the writing-table and began nibbling her pen.

"Of course it's rather difficult," she said, "to know what to tell him."

I bowed again, a trifle grimly perhaps.

"The way of transgressors," I reminded her, "is seldom easy."

"No, I suppose not," she said. "How clever you are. Aren't they frightfully proud of you at home?"

"I trust," I said, "that I have deserved their affection."

"Oh, I'm sure of it," she replied. "Now let me see."

She frowned for a moment and then began writing in a peculiarly large and childish hand.

"Of course I'll have to tell him," she said, "that you were at Septimus's school, where you were frightfully struck with the Lorton Bible, but that you didn't like Septimus—that'll be sure to please him—and so you didn't ask him to help you."

Her face began to brighten as she put this on paper, and I noticed that she was protruding the tip of her tongue.

"So you came here all by yourself, thinking he'd be at home, as it was the Easter holidays, and when you found he wasn't, you asked to see me instead, and I was most frightfully taken up with you."

Here she made a blot, but observed that it didn't matter, and then pronounced each word as she slowly inscribed it.

"He seems a most lovable and religious young man, and I do hope you'll help him all you can. Cross, cross, cross—those are for kisses—your ever loving and devoted Nina."

Then she handed me the letter.

"There you are," she said. "Now you'll know exactly what you'll have to tell him."

Releasing one of my hands, I read it quickly but carefully and returned it to her without comment.

"Will it do?" she said.

"I can only hope," I replied, "that, for your own sake, madam, it will."

She put it into an envelope and handed it back to me.

"Then I mustn't detain you," she said, "any longer."

Nor did I wish to stay. But I was now face to face with a situation of the utmost difficulty. Growingly repugnant as was this woman's presence to me, and singularly complete as had been my moral triumph, both my posterior trouser-buttons were still lying upon the floor.

"Oh, I see," she said, "would you like to take them with you? I'll put them in an envelope and then you won't lose them."

She accordingly did so, handing me the envelope, which I quickly took from her and placed in my pocket.

"You see, I'm afraid," she said, "that I could hardly trust myself to — to actually sew them on."

I bowed to her coldly, ignoring the split infinitive.

"Nor should I have seen fit," I said, "to con-

cede you the opportunity."

Obviously shamed, she lowered her eyes, and to hide her confusion rang the bell, and I am glad to acknowledge that the entrance of the good-looking parlourmaid was not wholly unwelcome to me. Though but a menial, I had already discovered in her some of the most desirable female qualities, and I am happy to record that in a moment of acute anxiety, she played an humble but not unworthy part.

Mrs. Lorton turned to her.

"Oh, Parker," she said, "poor Mr. Carp has had a most unfortunate accident."

Parker glanced at my hands.

"Yes, that's the trouble," said Mrs. Lorton. "Isn't it awkward for him?"

Parker looked at me with genuine sympathy.

"Oh, poor gentleman," she said, "it must be."

"You see," said Mrs. Lorton, "as a Xtian gentleman he's quite unable to let them go."

"Oh, quite," said Parker, "quite—except for a moment, perhaps, just to get a firmer hold."

Mrs. Lorton opened the door.

"So perhaps you'll help him," she said, "all you can."

Parker glanced at her inquiringly.

"I mean, put his stick under his arm and his hat on."

"Oh, gladly," said Parker, "ever so gladly."

"And escort him down the drive and open the front gate for him."

Preceded by Parker, therefore, I left the room, and though it was perhaps unfortunate that there were two other servants in the hall, at Parker's request one of them brought my hat, which Parker herself put on my head, while the other inserted my walking-stick, handle foremost, beneath my left arm-pit. Thanking them graciously, but without undue familiarity, and once again preceded by Parker, I then moved down the drive, of which this gentle domestic opened the front gate for me. Nor was that the last service that she was privileged to render me, for acting upon a suggestion that she had obligingly volunteered, I visited a tailor in Enfield High Street to whom, as I soon discovered, she hoped to be betrothed. An admirable young man, he had not as yet made up his mind as to whether it would be discreet to grant her request, but he was happy to provide me with two entirely new buttons and personally to affix them to the brink of my trousers.

Completely restored, then, in respect of my clothes, and physically recuperated with some excellent buns, I was enabled to assimilate the scenes of my return journey with an even keener

appreciation, and to arrive at Paternoster Row in the full confidence of final success. Not having a visiting-card, I had made up my mind to announce myself as a messenger from Mrs. Chrysostom; and, as it proved, this was the means of securing me an almost immediate audience. A somewhat short and extremely stout man with a heavily-coloured face and a drooping grey moustache, Mr. Chrysostom Lorton, whom I recognized from his photograph, might rather have been a general than a man of commerce; and I cannot say that a first inspection of him gave me entire satisfaction. Undoubtedly well-dressed, with a serpentine gold ring encasing the lower portion of each third finger, I was rather disagreeably affected both by his bushy and protruding eyebrows, as well as by his attitude towards a slight mischance associated with the inception of our interview. For in presenting the envelope, with which I had assured him Mrs. Chrysostom had entrusted me, I unfortunately handed him the one in which she had placed my posterior trouser-buttons. For a moment he stared at them with bulging eyeballs, and then I regret to say that he apparently forgot himself.

"Good God!" he said, "what the hell—crumph, crumph—do you mean, sir?"

Equally surprised, I have always been glad to remember that I was the first to recover my equanimity. Laughing merrily, I handed him the second envelope—in point of bestowal, of course, the first.

"Although you must not assume," I said, "that my natural mirth in any degree condones your involuntary blasphemy."

"Condones my what?" he said. "Crumph, crumph. But how the devil did she get hold of them?"

Still clinging to the original envelope, whose texture he obviously recognized, his globular eyes continued to be focussed on the two buttons before him. Briefly I explained to him the circumstances of their detachment. But for a considerable time he kept referring to the subject.

"I don't like it," he said, "I don't like it at all. It's not seemly. It might have been very serious."

Then a new suspicion darkened his countenance.

"I suppose I may assume," he said, "that you've had them replaced?"

I bowed reassuringly.

"By a tailor in Enfield," I said, "who was incidentally a great admirer of you."

His face cleared a little.

"Eh, what?" he said. "An admirer, you say? What was his name?"

I informed him and he nodded his head.

"Ah, yes, yes," he said, "a worthy young fellow."

By an auspicious chance too—if indeed it were one—a female clerk now entered the room, bearing in her hands a specimen copy of the nineteenth edition of the Bible for Schools. He glanced up from his wife's letter.

"Yes, yes," he said, "that will interest you."

"Nothing," I replied, "could have interested me more, unless perhaps a specimen of the twentieth."

Afterwards, as I shall show, my initial distrust of the man proved to have been only too well founded. But, as matters turned out on this particular afternoon, I left his office as a junior assistant. Placed under the charge of the show-room manager, I was to help this gentleman with his accounts and to act when necessary as a salesman of the firm's congenial and Xtian literature. It was a supreme moment—it was perhaps, in a good many ways, the supremest moment of my life—and I did not hesitate, after some further buns, to make suitable acknowledgment of it in St. Paul's Cathedral. Nor was the news with which I was confronted on my return

to Angela Gardens entirely able to counteract the deep satisfaction with which it filled me.

Nevertheless it was perhaps a timely reminder of the ever-present imminence of eternity, and it was certainly one that I have made a point of recalling in many subsequent moments of elation. For hardly had I opened the front gate when somebody touched me on the shoulder, and turning round, I observed Simeon Whey looking more preoccupied than I had ever seen him. His lips, at any rate, were moving rather convulsively and his laryngeal spasm was extremely marked.

"Kck," he said. "It's Silas."

"Dear me," I replied. "What's the matter with him?"

"Kck," he repeated. "He's dead."

"You don't say so?" I cried. "What did he die of?"

For some seconds he was unable to speak, obviously struggling with his vocal cords, and then with a blast of exceptional sadness he managed to expel the mournful details. Suffering, as it appeared, from a temporary gastric distention, the amiable lad had gone to the medicine chest where he had

CHAPTER X

Precautionary measures on entering commercial life. I join the *N.S.L.* and the *S.P.S.D.T.* A crying need in the conduct of prayer-meetings. I join the *A.D.S.U.* Personal appearance of Ezekiel Stool. Personal appearance of his five sisters. Predicament of Ezekiel Stool on the fifth of November. A timely instance of presence of mind. I am invited to a meal at the Stools' residence. A foreshadowing of sinister events.

It was a distressing end. Few things are more distressing, indeed, than the sudden demise of a potential clergyman. And for the first three or four days of my work in Paternoster Row my spirits were appreciably clouded. Nevertheless, I was happy not only that I had embarked upon the career so satisfactorily chosen for me, but also in the consciousness that, but for my own perspicacity, Providence would have found it difficult to assist me. Moreover, it was an additional comfort to me to reflect that, during my upward progress in the firm, I should have the obligatory if unwilling support of Mrs. Chrysostom Lorton. A word in the ear of her husband, and her infamy could be no longer concealed, and I could not suppose that, callous as she was, she would dare to expose herself to such an event.

Few young men, therefore, can have entered business life better equipped or so advantageously placed, and had I in consequence been carried away a little, it would scarcely perhaps have been unnatural. Very fortunately, however, and thanks in a great degree to the character-forming incidents already related, I realized from the outset that I was now definitely committed to the most critical period of a young man's life—namely, the years, so fatal to the vast majority, between his seventeenth and twenty-fourth birthdays. Then it is, alas, that intoxicated with the knowledge that he has become, in my father's phrase, a marriageable adult that he begins to resort for the first time to the tobacconist and the publican—to buy the cigarette that will so inevitably lure him into loose and licentious company, and the fermented liquor that will only too surely encase him in a drunkard's coffin.

Nor is that all. For it is in these same years, turning aside from the pleasures of home—from such innocent round games as Conceal the Thimble or the less familiar Up Jenkins, or from the happy singing round the family harmonium of such a humorous glee as Three Blind Mice—that he enters the Pit (so appropriately named) of some garish and degrading theatre.

It is a sorrowful spectacle. But happily for

my own sake, I had already been so deeply saddened by it that I had long since resolved, when the necessity should arise, to take every possible precaution. No sooner, therefore, had I obtained my appointment than I hastened to enrol myself as a member of the Peckham Branch of the Non-Smokers' League as well as of the Kennington Division of the Society for the Prohibition of the Strong Drink Traffic. Congenial in every way, I not only discovered in these an enormous sphere for the exercise of my influence, but the membership of both societies conferred the privilege of wearing a small badge or bone medallion.

A slightly convex and circular plaque to be pinned on the lapel of the wearer's coat, the token of membership of the Non-Smokers' League was about an inch in diameter. Of a pale cream colour, it was tastefully wreathed with dark blue lilies, symbolic of purity, the centre of it being occupied with the initials *N.S.L.* boldly imprinted in the same colours. No less decorative to the wearer than intriguing to the beholder, a reply to the question so often put as to what the initials *N.S.L.* stood for frequently afforded a valuable opportunity for soul-intercourse on the subject of tobacco.

Nor was the medallion of the Society for the

Prohibition of the Strong Drink Traffic either less attractive or efficient as an instigator of fruitful converse. Slightly larger—its diameter was an inch and a quarter—its ground-work was of an olive green, the letters *S.P.S.D.T.* richly emerging from this in an ingenious monogram of canary yellow.

Into the work of these societies I now threw myself with all the vehemence at my command, and had soon forced myself into the innermost councils of the local branch of each. Meeting every fortnight in a neighbouring church hall, the Peckham Branch of the Non-Smokers' League did not confine itself merely to the organization of these central gatherings. Valuable as they were in providing a pulpit for lectures upon nicotine-poisoning and its attendant evils, we rightly regarded the outside world as the main field of our endeavours. Provided with such strikingly headed pamphlets as *A Gentleman or a Chimney?* or the even more dramatic and spiritually searching *Your Soul or Your Cigar?* we would range the streets addressing obvious smokers, or station ourselves upon the pavement in the neighbourhood of tobacconists' shops. In this way, though frequently required to endure verbal persecution, I am proud to believe that the work performed by us was both timely and enduring.

Working on lines that were somewhat similar, the Kennington Division of the *S.P.S.D.T.* held monthly re-unions for the purpose of communally denouncing the use of alcohol; and here we would discuss, over cups of tea and slices of plain but palatable cake, the results of our labours during the previous four weeks and our plans for the four immediately ensuing. Appreciably more dangerous, in that we deemed it our duty to distribute literature at the doors of Public Houses, whence there would emerge in depressingly large numbers combative men of considerable size, we never embarked upon this particular mission save in groups of four or five, each member being provided with a police whistle in addition to his parcel of appropriate leaflets.

Admirably illustrated, these bore such arresting titles as *Passing the Poison* or *From Beer to Bier*, two of the most efficient being *The Dram Drinker's Downfall*, and *Virtue versus Vertigo*. That all these works, like those of the N.S.L., were published by the firm of Chrysostom Lorton was, of course, an additional and pleasurable inducement to further their disposal in every way. And although as yet this could not result for me in any direct financial advantage, it must be remembered that at this time there was still every prospect of its eventually doing so.

To thousands of my readers, slacker in fibre, or not so resolute in the pursuit of goodness, it may well seem now as if these activities must have exhausted my spiritual capacity. But this was not the case, and conscious as I was—it would have been an affectation to deny it—of my very rapidly increasing ability for both religious and commercial leadership, I took every opportunity of developing my unchallenged gift of self-expression. Thus, within a year of my business advent, I had not only addressed both the foregoing societies, but I had become a familiar and, I trust, welcome figure at every local prayer-meeting.

I use the word welcome because I had not only discerned in these gatherings an admirable vehicle of elocutionary progress, but I had quickly discovered in them a crying need that it was plainly my duty to supply. Familiar to every frequenter of the average prayer-meeting, whether Church of England or Nonconformist, this was nothing less than the presence of a gap-filler, especially in the earlier stages of the proceedings. Few can have failed, for example, to notice the pause that almost invariably takes place after the Chairman has delivered his own petition and invited the efforts of further supplicants. Painful in itself, in that it so often

accentuates the respiratory difficulties of those present, how often is it broken, alas, by the simultaneous commencement of two or more separate competitors? Nor is that all. For, each realizing that he is too late, a disheartened silence generally ensues, only to be broken perhaps by a second neck-to-neck effort on the part of all the previous starters that abortively collapses again on some such unfortunate phrase as "Oh dear, oh Lord."

It was here, then, that I descried, and at once began to work, an almost virgin field, never allowing an instant to elapse after the right to supplicate had been declared general. Indeed on many occasions I filled the subsequent gaps also, and at one particularly reluctant gathering, I can well remember, in less than an hour, offering a dozen full-length petitions. That I soon had rivals goes without saying. Who, in such a position, could have escaped them? But once started, I allowed no second petitioner to deflect or abbreviate my entreaties.

Perhaps the work, however, in which I was most interested was that of the Anti-Dramatic and Saltatory* Union, founded by Ezekiel Stool, the son of Abraham Stool, the inventor and proprietor of Stool's Adult Gripe Water. Probably the most

* Appertaining to dancing.

persistent and unflinching opponent that the theatre and dancing saloon have ever known, he was then some twenty-six years of age and of a very remarkable and beautiful character. Indeed all that he lacked of these two qualities in his actual physical appearance seemed to have been concentrated with additional force in his spiritual personality. No taller than myself, and weighing considerably less, he had suffered all his life from an inherent dread of shaving, and the greater portion of his face was in consequence obliterated by a profuse but gentle growth of hair. His voice, too, owing to some developmental defect, had only partially broken; and indeed his father Abraham (afterwards removed to an asylum) had on more than one occasion attempted to sacrifice him, under the mistaken impression that he was some sort of animal that would be suitable as a burnt offering.

Regarded as a character, however, and when he had fully assured himself that he was not in the presence of a theatre-goer or dancer, it would have been difficult to imagine a more affectionate or deeply trustful companion;* and many an hour we spent together combating the drama, both in Central London and the suburbs. Well provided with money, thanks to the sales of the

* It was far otherwise, alas, in later years.

Gripe Water—an excellent remedy to which I have frequently had recourse—he had himself composed and caused to be printed several extremely powerful leaflets. Of these perhaps the best were *The Chorus Girl's Catastrophe* and *Did Wycliffe Waltz?* and these we would distribute in large numbers among the degenerate pleasure-seekers standing outside theatres. Purchasing seats, too, we would ourselves from time to time enter these buildings, rising in our places when the curtain was drawn up and audibly rebuking the performers. Needless to say, having registered our protest, we would then immediately leave the premises, not always immune from the coarse objurgations of obviously interested minions.

Nor were we less vigorous in our onslaught upon the equally prevalent sin of dancing, either personally attending or stationing delegates at the entrances to halls or private houses, and endeavouring if possible by individual appeals to warn or deter would-be malefactors. An uphill task, it was not for us to say to how great an extent we may have succeeded, but I can remember at least twelve persons, male and female, who promised to consider what we had pointed out to them.

Deeply as I appreciated, however, the oppor-

tunity of furthering this valuable and congenial work, I had not as yet realized the ultimate object that an inscrutable Providence had in view, or that in Ezekiel Stool I had already been handed the compass that was destined to lead my steps to matrimony. Such was the case, however, little as I then dreamed it, and even less, if such a thing were possible, was I attracted, on a first acquaintance, to any of his five sisters. Simply divided into twins and triplets, these were all younger than Ezekiel himself, the triplets being then twenty-four, and the twins three years younger. None of them was married, and indeed, as regarded the triplets, this was scarcely perhaps to be wondered at. For though they had been interestingly named by their father as Faith, Hope, and Charity, they were plain girls, deeply marked by the smallpox, and of rather less than the average intelligence. Nor indeed were the twins, Tact and Understanding, at all remarkable for personal beauty, and the toes of one of them, as I was afterwards to discover, were most unfortunately webbed. On the other hand, they were kindly, domestic creatures. All five of them could play the piano. And the heart of each, as they have frequently told me, was profoundly stirred by my first visit.

Little as I shared, however, though I could not

fail to perceive, the cardiac exaltation of these five females, I have always looked back to that first visit with a very considerable degree of pleasure, and not the less so because of the preliminary service that I was able to render their brother Ezekiel. Indeed it was this that led to an invitation to share the evening meal at the Stools' house, a substantial residence with a large garden, about five minutes' walk from Camberwell Green.

A November dusk, some eighteen months or so after my entrance into commercial life, I had forgotten that it was the anniversary of the attempt of Guy Fawkes to destroy the Upper Chamber of our Legislature, and my thoughts were engaged upon other matters as I began to walk home from the omnibus stopping-place. I had hardly walked a hundred yards, however, when my attention was suddenly attracted to a somewhat vociferous group of boys, in the midst of whom to my surprise and anxiety, I saw my friend Ezekiel Stool. For a moment I was at a loss both as how to proceed and the possible reason for the conclave. But a moment later I discovered that the position was no less disturbing than grotesque. Doubtless intoxicated with the memories of the day, these ignorant and turbulent youths had apparently discerned in my

friend Ezekiel a resemblance to the conspirator of 1605. Nay, they had gone further. They had professed to perceive in him an actual reincarnation of the original miscreant, and this in spite of the fact that Ezekiel had repeatedly explained to them that he had no knowledge of pyrotechnics.

"Believe me," he had said, "I am neither the man you mention, nor do I resemble any authentic portrait of him. Nor have I placed explosives under anybody's chamber either in London or the Provinces."

Despite his denials, however, supported as they were by references to prominent local residents, the group of vociferators was quickly growing both in numbers and excitement, and several suggestions were being audibly made that he should be exterminated by fire. It was a moment for action, and I took it. Fortunately my police whistle was in my pocket. And in the next instant I was blowing blast upon blast to the utmost capacity of my lung power. The effect was immediate. For scarcely had the boys dispersed when three or four constables arrived on the scene, all of them breathless from the act of running, but carrying their truncheons in their hands. Being breathless too, I could only point at Ezekiel, and for the first moment they mis-

understood me, rapidly surrounding him, as he leaned against a lamp-post, and lifting their truncheons above their heads. Once again, therefore, it was a moment for action, and once again I took it. Throwing myself in front of him, I shouted to them to forbear, and then very briefly I explained what had happened. Unfortunately, as I have said, the boys had already dispersed. But then, as I pointed out to them, that had been my object, and the fact that this had taken place before their arrival was no reflection upon their courage. I cannot record, however, that their reception of this news was either Xtian or even courteous, and it was a very great relief both to myself and Ezekiel when these powerful professionals at last went away. Nevertheless, as Ezekiel said, I had probably twice saved his life, and during the evening meal, to which he at once invited me, both his parents and his five sisters repeatedly expressed their satisfaction. Mr. Abraham Stool, indeed, who had not then been segregated, but who was already under the impression that he was the Hebrew patriarch, several times insisted upon my approaching him and placing my hand under his left thigh, after which he would offer me, in addition to Mrs. Stool, a varying number of rams and goats.

Needless to say, I declined to accept these, and

a week or two later, as I have already indicated, it was deemed advisable, owing to his tendency to sacrifice, to place him in other and remoter surroundings. But it was a happy evening, during which, as I shall always remember, Ezekiel Stool expressed his regret that my father and myself were not fellow-worshippers with them at St. Nicholas, Newington Butts. Satisfied as we were, however, with St. James-the-Least-of-All, where my father had now become senior sidesman, we had seen no reason, as I was obliged to point out to him, for again transferring our worship; and little did I dream that even as I was speaking those sinister events were already shaping themselves that were ultimately to unite us—their only redeeming outcome—in this new and closer bond.

CHAPTER XI

Design for my grandfather's tomb. Death and interment of Mrs. Emily Smith and the aunt that had stood with my mother's mother at the bottom of the stairs. Effect upon my father's health. Alexander Carkeek and his sons. Arrival home from the Stools First tidings of the new lectern. My father's interview with the vicar. Curious instance of transposition of consonants. My father rehearses his denunciation. Arrival of Simeon Whey. My father repeats his denunciation.

PERMANENTLY impaired as had been my father's health by the ordeal referred to in Chapter VIII he had not permitted this, as I have said, to interfere with his duties as a sidesman; and there were still occasions upon which he would exhibit all his old-time fire and determination. Thus when my mother's parents had been destroyed by a tram accident about a month after the decease of Silas Whey, it was he who had arranged the funeral, chosen the hymns, and designed the monument by which they were to be commemorated. The provision business having declined somewhat, the chief factor in the design had necessarily been one of economy, and my father had therefore confined himself to a broken column some three inches in diameter and a foot

high. Insufficient to accommodate their full names, their initials had been tastefully engraved upon it, the surface of the grave being sprinkled with flints that would require no subsequent upkeep.

In conjunction with Mr. Balfour Whey, too, it was he who had selected a house for my mother's eight sisters, small but sufficient and in a remote part of Wales, where they would be able to husband their meagre income. Bitterly opposed as the eight sisters had been both to living together and leaving Walworth, my father had overcome them by the sheer power of his torrential eloquence and personality. Surrounded by strangers, as he had irresistibly reminded them, most of whom were unacquainted with the English language, fifteen miles from a railway station and three and a half from the nearest village, they would have neither the occasion nor the opportunity to dissipate their substance in convivial extravagance, while the precipitous roads, by which alone the house that he had chosen for them could be approached, would give them an appetite for the extremely simple fare which would be all that their means would allow them to purchase. To Wales they had gone, therefore, and though he continued to receive letters from them, couched in terms of the basest

ingratitude, he neither replied to these nor permitted them to modify his kindly consideration for my mother.

Nor had he been less adequate in dealing with the circumstances that had arisen, a few months later, in connection with the demises of Mrs. Emily Smith and the aunt that had stood with my mother's mother at the foot of the stairs. Both these ladies, who had been living on Post Office annuities, had unhappily died after sharing a sausage, strongly suspected, though never actually proved, of harbouring the bacillus of botulism. Thanks to my father's efforts, however, seconded by Mr. Balfour Whey, the firm by whom the sausage had been manufactured consented without prejudice to pay a sum of money sufficient to provide for the ladies' interment. I have said sufficient, but after my father had reimbursed himself and paid the expenses of Mr. Whey, he was once more faced, as in the case of my grand-parents, with an acute necessity for economy. Burying them in a double coffin, however, of his own design—a design for which he afterwards obtained the patent—he succeeded not only in keeping the undertaker's bill within the balance at his disposal, but in providing a surplus with which he afterwards obtained a small iron slab containing their names and ages. Nor was

that all, for with the pound or two that was over he bought a third-class ticket to Aberdeen, where he had obtained a situation for Mrs. Emily Smith's grand-daughter as housemaid in a home for Xtian workers.

After every such exhibition of pristine vigour, however, my father experienced an acute reaction, and for many weeks would become a martyr not only to neurasthenic indigestion, but to digestive neurasthenia accompanied by flatulence of the severest order. For months on end, indeed, my mother would be obliged to sit by his bedside in case he should wake up and require abdominal kneading, and few were the nights upon which she had not in addition to go downstairs and make him some cocoa. But he would never allow himself to be daunted. His breakfast the next morning would be as hearty as usual. And he was never deterred by even the most obstinate inflation from the performance of a moral or religious duty. Despite his courage, however, he was leaning on me with ever-increasing emphasis, and I am proud to recall that, in what was so soon to prove the heaviest ordeal of his life, I was able to render him very material and indeed essential assistance.

Such, then, was the position when I parted with the Stools, after the evening meal that I have

just recorded. And it was rather with their cries of thanks and gentle admiration resounding through the chill November night than with any sense of impending trouble that I turned my footsteps towards home. Indeed, as I buttoned up my overcoat and drew my scarf over my mouth, I had every reason to feel content both on my own account and my father's, whose health for some weeks had been slowly improving. For not only had my mother's parents been safely interred and her eight sisters satisfactorily disposed of, her two aunts competently buried, and Emily Smith junior despatched to Aberdeen, but my father, as I have indicated, had finally established himself as the senior sidesman of St. James-the-Least-of-All.

Conferring the right of leading the other sidesmen up the central aisle at the end of the collection, this was the more gratifying since my father had only obtained it as the result of a prolonged and determined struggle, in which his chief opponent had been a retired fishmonger, known as Alexander Carkeek. A northern Caledonian of the most offensive type, this gentleman, as he liked to consider himself, was now a sleeping partner in the firm of Carkeek and Carkeek, fishmongers and poulterers in the Kennington Road, and had long been suspected, both by my father

and myself, of a secret addiction to alcohol. Of middle height—he was perhaps taller than my father by an inch and three-quarters or two inches—his abdominal circumference was equally extensive and his bullet-shaped face even more highly coloured. Unlike my father, however, he had signally failed in retaining the bulk of his hair, and even his two sons, Corkran and Cosmo, were showing signs of becoming bald. Sidesmen like their father, they were only less aggressive, and during the long contest for supremacy, they had seized every opportunity of detaining or distracting my father while their own got into position at the head of the line. Indeed on one occasion, when my father had paused for a moment to adjust a door-handle half-way up the aisle, they had deliberately encouraged their father to push himself in front and thereby head the procession. Naturally resenting this, my father had immediately plunged forward, with the painful result that the two of them had become wedged and had been unable, owing to their respective girths, either to advance or retreat. Needless to say, in the struggle that ensued, my father had been the first to break away and had arrived at the chancel half an abdomen ahead of his pertinacious rival.

Ultimately, as I have said, however, thanks to

repeated protests and an impassioned interview with the vicar, my father had definitely secured for himself the right of precedence, though the Carkeeks still remained sidesmen. Nor was that all. For it was now generally known that the vicar's churchwarden was about to retire, and there could be little doubt, as my father had several times observed to me, as to the probable successor to this great position.

It was with a comparatively light heart, therefore, that I opened the front door, hung up my hat and coat and folded my scarf, and entered the parlour ready to describe to my father the events that had occupied my evening; and my distress can be imagined when I at once perceived him to be in a state of the acutest physical congestion. Facially suffused to an alarming extent, the hairs of his moustache were visibly projecting, and I naturally assumed at first that he must have become the subject of an exceptional degree of intestinal discomfort. On closer inspection, however, I observed that this could scarcely be the case since his waistcoat buttons were still fastened, and for a brief second I had a fearful apprehension that he was annoyed with myself. He did, in fact, ask me rather abruptly the reason for my absence from the evening meal. But his expression lightened a little when I told him

where I had been and of the services rendered by me to Ezekiel Stool.

"Yes, it's a good family," he said, "a very good family, and there's money in it as well as religion."

The next moment, however, his face had resumed its congestion, and as I leaned back while my mother unlaced my boots, it became increasingly evident to me that I was in the presence of a spiritual crisis of the gravest kind. Nay, even then, I remember, I had a sudden presentiment that here was a situation of no common significance, and I signalled to my mother to be as rapid as possible in bringing me my slippers and leaving us alone. Then I took a deep breath and, leaning forward a little, gently touched my father's knee.

"Can I not help you?" I said.

My father stared at me. For perhaps a minute his lips moved convulsively. Then in a strangled voice he uttered a single word, followed a little later by fourteen other words.

"Carkeek," he said. "It's that fellow Carkeek. He's been and presented the church with a lectern."

For a moment I was utterly dumbfounded.

"A lectern?" I asked.

My father nodded.

"Made of brass," he said, "in the image of a bird."

"Of a bird?" I cried. "What sort of bird?"

"Of an eagle," said my father, "looking towards the left."

"Towards the left?" I said. "But where's it to stand?"

"At the top of the aisle," said my father, "just below the chancel steps."

"But, dear father," I cried, "we already have a lectern," and indeed this was literally the case, since the cavity or enclosure adjoining the choir seats, from which the vicar or his curate read the service, was also provided with a separate book-rest for the purpose of delivering the lessons.

"Yes, I know," said my father, "but that wouldn't deter Carkeek."

"But surely," I cried, "the vicar hasn't accepted it?"

"He has not only accepted it," said my father, "but the thing's in position."

"In position," I said, "and looking to the left?"

My father nodded again.

"Just west of south," he said.

"But good heavens," I cried, "I say it in all reverence, then it must be staring right into our pew."

"So it is," said my father, "and not only that, the brazen hell-bird's protruding its tongue."

The room darkened a little.

"But not intentionally?" I asked. "You don't mean to say that it's protruding its tongue intentionally?"

My father gulped once or twice. Then he bowed his head.

"Yes, I do," he said, "and I say it deliberately."

Then he rose to his feet and stood looking down at me.

"And that's not the worst," he said, "not by a long way."

"Not the worst?" I cried. "What do you mean?"

My father swayed a little, but managed to recover himself.

"I mean this," he said. "I mean that Alexander Carkeek is trying to get himself made churchwarden."

For a moment I was stunned. My father sat heavily down again.

"But good God," I cried, "that amounts to simony."

"I know," said my father. "That's what I've told Carkeek."

"Then you've seen him?" I said.

My father looked at me grimly.

"I've not only seen him," he answered, "but I've told him what I've thought of him. And I've explicitly informed him that if he's made a churchwarden, I shall take proceedings against him in the ecclesiastical courts."

My father leaned back closing his eyes, and I had never admired him more, perhaps, than at that moment.

"And the vicar," I said. "Have you spoken to the vicar?"

"I was obliged to warn him," said my father, "in identical terms."

"You could do no less," I said. "But what about the bird itself?"

"I regret to say," said my father, "that he professed to admire it."

I stared at him aghast.

"Professed to admire it?" I gasped. "The vicar that we have supported all these years?"

My father covered his eyes for a moment.

"Even so," he said. "As I had to point out to him, I was seriously shaken."

"But surely you protested," I cried.

"For seventy-five minutes," said my father.

"But couldn't he perceive," I said, "that it was a direct insult to us?"

My father moved his hand a little.

"He claimed that it was not so. He said that the majority of these birds looked towards the left."

"But not with their tongues out," I cried.

"He seemed to think so. He said it was symbolic of inward joy."

"But good heavens," I said, "I repeat it with all reverence, does he expect us to worship under conditions like that?"

"I'm sorry to say," said my father, "that he had appeared to contemplate it prior to my insistence on its immediate removal."

My heart gave a great leap.

"Then it's being taken down?" I cried.

But my father stared at me with bulging eyes. My heart fell back again.

"I don't know," he said. "That's why I'm preparing my denunciation."

It was a solemn moment. It was perhaps the solemnest moment that either of us had been called upon to experience, and even as I spoke, I felt that we were drawing towards the threshold of one of the greatest issues of our terrestrial life.

"Then he refused?" I said.

"Let me be quite fair," said my father. "He rather temporized than actually refused."

I could not help smiling a little sardonically.

"The distinction is a fine one," I said. "I suppose he adduced some grounds?"

My father breathed heavily.

"He was insolent enough to remind me," he said, "that it was eight o'clock on Saturday evening and that the bird in question, which had only just been set up, weighed approximately a quarter of a ton. He also suggested that the congregation ought to have an opportunity of inspecting it."

"The congregation?" I cried. "But what has the congregation to do with it? It's not putting its tongue out at the congregation."

My father inclined his head.

"Precisely what I told him," he said, "but he merely fell back upon his previous argument, that the exposure of the tongue, if indeed it were a tongue, was merely significant of good tidings."

"I see," I said. "So you gave him an ultimatum?"

"I was compelled to," said my father. "There was no other course. Either it must be removed, I told him, before to-morrow morning or I should publicly denounce it during morning service."

"And what did he say?" I asked.

My father made a contemptuous gesture.

"Oh, you know what he is," he replied, "a weed before the rind."

"You mean a reed," I said.

"What did I say?" said my father.

"You said a weed," I said.

"I said a weed?" said my father.

"A weed before the wind," I said. "I mean the rind."

"The rind?" said my father. "But that's wrong."

"Yes. But that's what you said," I said.

"A weed before the rind?" said my father.

"Yes, a transposition," I explained, "of the initial consonants."

"A transposition?" inquired my father.

"Yes, an error in enunciation," I said, "such as frequently takes place under emotional stress."

"But, I don't understand," said my father.

"You meant a reed before the wind," I said.

"Well, of course," said my father. "That's what I said."

"No, you said a weed," I said, "a weed before the rind."

"But how can a weed be before the rind?" said my father.

"But you didn't mean that," I said. "You meant a reed before the wind."

"Well, that's what he is," said my father.

"That's just what I say. That's why he implored me not to make a denunciation."

"But of course you will," I said.

My father nodded.

"Immediately after the collection," said my father, "and before the blessing."

I looked at the clock. It was a quarter past ten. In an hour and three-quarters the Sabbath would be upon us. There was not much time. I glanced at my father anxiously.

"How far have you got?" I asked.

"About half-way," he said.

Then he rose to his feet again and crossed to the harmonium.

"Ring for the cocoa," he said. I sprang to the bell. But just as I reached it my mother entered, bearing two cups of the sustaining fluid. Signaling to her to withdraw, he lifted one of the cups and drained its contents at a single gulp.

"Now, listen," he said, and in a low but rising voice, he began a denunciation that I shall never forget.

Impeccable in logic, succinct in argument, perfect in phrasing and faultlessly delivered, I have never, I think, listened to so moving an utterance as the initial moiety of my father's denunciation. Beginning, as I have said, in a low voice, yet one that was crystal clear in its pene-

trating capacity, for the first five minutes or so my father refused to allow himself the adventitious aid of a single gesture. It was the gathering of the storm, as it were, the marshalling of the hosts of heaven, composed but relentless, above the brazen image. Then he paused for a moment, indicating the aspidistra that stood upon a tripod in the corner of the room.

"Now, say that's the bird," he said, and suddenly like a flash of lightning, his right index finger was quivering upon the air. Involuntarily I leapt round and stared at the aspidistra, and then like the deafening down-burst of a tornado, my father expanded his chest, threw back his head, and opened the full flood-gates of his passion. Pallid and cowering, I crept behind the armchair, while syllable after syllable rent the night, and the delirious harmonium leapt and crashed down again beneath the palpitant thunder of his blows. Then almost as suddenly he stopped.

"That's as far as I've got," he said.

I crept from my shelter.

"Is there to be much more?" I asked.

"About five minutes' calm," he said, "and then the final, culminating climax."

He wiped his forehead.

"I've got it roughed out," he said, "if you'd

like to hear it before it's rounded off."

I signified my assent, and he proceeded. But indeed it already seemed to me to be practically flawless, while the ultimate crescendo, prepared as I had believed myself, left me literally prostrate and fighting for breath. My father, on the other hand, although he was perspiring freely, seemed to have become endowed with a new lease of life, and was able single-handed to replace the harmonium which had fallen upon its face during his closing sentence. Then there came a low knock on the parlour window. It was nearly eleven; we stared at each other startled; and it was with considerable relief that we perceived the newcomer to be no more important than Simeon Whey. Yet his errand was a kind one, although it was a considerable time before he was sufficiently master of himself to explain his presence, while we had already foreseen and prepared for the tidings that had brought the admirable youth to our window.

Hearing from his father, whom my father had already consulted, of the very great trouble with which we were threatened, he had put on his hat and coat, wrapped his scarf round his neck, and immediately hurried to St. James-the-Least-of-All. There, with infinite cunning and hardly less devotion, he had managed to conceal himself be-

hind a tombstone, where he had awaited for nearly an hour and a half the arrival of workmen to remove the lectern. None had come, however, and somewhere about half-past ten, he had reluctantly abandoned his vigil and, faint with hunger, hurried to Angela Gardens to apprise us of its result.

"Kck," he said, when we had given him a biscuit, "I'm afraid it'll be a case of denunciation."

My father nodded grimly.

"So I had anticipated," he said. "In fact, I had just been denouncing when you knocked at the window."

"Kck," said Simeon—now a theological student—"I should like to have heard you."

My father glanced at me, and I inclined my head.

"I'll do it again," he said, and he returned to the harmonium.

Nor was he less powerful than on the first occasion, and I shall never forget his effect on Simeon Whey. Beginning as before in a low voice, yet one that was crystal clear in its penetrative capacity, for the first five minutes or so he refused to allow himself the adventitious aid of a single gesture. It was the gathering of the storm, as it were, the marshalling of the hosts of

heaven, composed but relentless, above the brazen image. Then he paused for a moment, again indicating the aspidistra that stood upon a tripod in the corner of the room.

"Now, say that's the bird," he said, and suddenly, like a flash of lightning, his right index finger was quivering upon the air. Involuntarily Simeon leapt round and stared at the aspidistra, and then like the deafening down-burst of a tornado, my father expanded his chest, threw back his head, and opened the full flood-gates of his passion. Pallid and cowering, Simeon crept behind the armchair while syllable after syllable rent the night, and the delirious harmonium leapt and crashed down again beneath the palpitant thunder of my father's blows. Then for five minutes there was a comparative calm, while Simeon Whey crept from his shelter, until the ultimate crescendo stretched him helpless on the carpet, blue in the face, and fighting for his breath. Then he staggered to his feet and sank into the armchair, while my father once more picked up the harmonium.

"Oh, kck," he said, "kck."

It was all that the poor youth was able to utter.

CHAPTER XII

Breakfast finds us calm but grave. My mother is allowed to accompany us to church. My father's clothing and general demeanour. Remark of Simeon Whey on my father's hat. First impressions of the new lectern. Unmistakable evidences of guilt. The vicer's feeble apologia. A devilish device and its disastrous results. I race with Cockran for half-a-crown. My poor father is three times dropped.

IMPECCABLE in logic, as I have already said, succinct in argument, and perfect in phrasing, it is with the profoundest regret that I have been obliged to omit from these pages the actual words of my father's denunciation; and I should like to make it quite clear that for the inevitable disappointment my publishers alone must bear the blame. Bitterly as I have protested, however, they have replied to every argument with sordid references to the cost of production, and this volume has in consequence been rushed through the press deprived of my poor father's terrible indictment.* Nor is this the less deplorable because at the last moment my father himself was prohibited from uttering it, owing to an intervention of Providence as little to have been

* It is my full intention, however, to pursue this matter further, and any reader desirous of signing an appeal should instantly communicate with me at Wilhelmina, Nassington Park Gardens, Hornsey.

expected as it has always appeared to me inexplicable. Indeed, had we foreseen it, I doubt if either my father or myself would have been able to retain his sanity, and we should certainly not have met, as we did the next morning, in a comparatively cheerful frame of mind.

Yet this was the case, and although, as each of us remarked, the expression of the other was unwontedly grave, it was a relief to us both to learn that neither of us had spent a bad, or even indifferent, night. Considering the circumstances, indeed, we had slept remarkably well, and in view of the tremendous task that now certainly awaited us, each of us was scrupulous to fortify his person with as large and nourishing a meal as possible. As we sang the morning hymn, too, I was glad to perceive that my father's voice was in exceptional condition, while the sunshine and soft air augured well for a particularly large congregation.

"The more, the better," said my father, and he even went so far as to permit the attendance of my mother, thereby excusing her from her usual task of preparing our midday meal or dinner.

"We'll have something cold," he said, "middle day, and she shall give us a good hot meal after evening service."

With myself on his right, then, and my mother on his left, we left the house at 10.45, and I have never, I think, seen my father so meticulously dressed as on this stern but necessary occasion. Wearing his longest frock-coat, a double-breasted gentian waistcoat, faultlessly creased trousers, and the glossiest of brown boots, his collar was encircled with a cream-coloured velvet tie, held in position by a single Cape garnet. By a happy circumstance, too, his bowler hat had only been purchased the week before; and indeed, as Simeon whispered to me, it might rather have been that of some French aristocrat mounting the tumbril than of a Xtian sidesman of the United Kingdom on his way to denounce a lectern. Nor did he hesitate to lift it when we met Mr. and Mrs. Carkeek, accompanied by Cosmo and Corkran, although I have seen nothing more distant than the inclination of the head with which he signified consciousness of their presence. As Simeon said to me: "Your father may be a Xtian, but he never forgets that he's a gentleman."

We were now on the brink, however, of the church porch—a couple of steps and the effigy would be in sight—and deeply as we had impressed upon each other the necessity for self-command, I could not help staggering a little and

leaning against Simeon. My father staggered too, leaning against Mr. Balfour Whey, while my mother staggered against Mrs. Meatson, the obliging wife of Mr. Meatson, the editor of the parish magazine. Then with a supreme effort we recovered our equilibria, and in the next moment—albeit at a distance—we were facing an image that, for malignant effrontery, was surely unparalleled in Church history.

I say facing, for although its actual countenance was turned, as I have said, towards the left, its malevolent bosom as well as its right eye were directly focussed upon our persons. Nor can I trust myself, even now, to describe its effect upon us as we moved up the aisle, although every detail of its repulsive appearance was indelibly graved upon my memory. Suffice it to say, therefore, that it gave the general impression of a vulture rather than an eagle; that it appeared to have robbed an arsenal of a medium-sized cannon-ball, upon which it now stood poised on the summit of a mast; and that its outspread wings had been blasphemously converted into a support for the Holy Scriptures. Nor was that all, for at each corner of the pedestal, in which the mast had been embedded, was an additional claw with projecting talons of undisguised ferocity—the total effect from the bottom of the

aisle being that of a six-clawed monster about to expectorate.

Repellent as was its appearance, however, even at a distance, it was not until we drew nearer to it up the central aisle that I suddenly became aware in it of a quite unforeseen and infinitely sinister significance. For now, as we approached our pew, which was the front one on the right, it was perfectly clear that its eyes had been so fashioned as to be capable of regarding us, either separately or in unison, with an almost unbelievable degree of venom. But they could do more, for what was my horror, just as we were about to turn into our pew, to perceive that my father, whose colour had visibly deepened, was still holding on towards the chancel. Nay, to be exact, he was still holding on towards the very image that he had come to condemn, with his two eyes fixed and slowly converging upon the baleful eyeball of the bird itself. For a moment I stood spellbound. What was he about to do? And then, as the pew rocked beneath my feet, I suddenly realized that my poor father had been foully and deliberately hypnotized.

It was a critical instant. Another couple of steps, and one of two things must inevitably have happened. He would either have dashed his forehead against the bird's bosom, or his abdomen

would have collided with the mast. Nor was the danger less real because it was as yet unperceived either by my mother or the rest of the congregation. With an enormous effort, however, I succeeded in rallying myself and seizing and compressing my father's right elbow, steering him half-conscious into his usual place, where he immediately fell forward upon his knees. Then I bent down. "It was the bird's eye," I said. "Whatever you do, avoid the bird's eye," and ample was my reward in the immensely powerful squeeze which was the only thanks he was able to bestow.

But the danger was not over, for, now that we were in our pew, we were being permanently impinged upon by the bird's full visage, and I saw at once that we should be taxed to the uttermost to sustain its gaze until the end of the service. Regarded from this aspect, however, in which its competing tongue masked the malignity of its eyes, its expression was less menacing than insolent, albeit to an almost intolerable extent. And it was obviously in the exposed eye, solitary and unchallenged, with which it had followed us up the aisle, that its concentrated malice had found the weapon most effective for its purpose. Temporarily released, therefore, from the acutest personal anxiety, I was at last in a position to

observe my fellow-worshippers, and I would that I could record even some semblance of resentment at the loathsome object with which they had been confronted. Upon no face, however, could I see anything inscribed beyond an unintelligent curiosity, while upon many I could not fail to observe an even more lamentable admiration.

Indeed I could hear actual whispers, indicative of approval, such as "Did you ever, now?" or "Isn't it handsome?" while some put such queries to one another as: "What do you suppose it cost?" "Whoever could have paid for it?" and "Hasn't it got a polish?" Nor have I seen anything, I think, quite so nauseating to a sensitive Xtian stomach as the scarcely-concealed triumph so smugly discernible upon the faces of the four Carkeeks. My only reassurance, in fact, lay in the reflection that my father's denunciation had yet to come; that in so large an assembly there must surely be one or two to whom the bird's true character must have been obvious; and that the vicar and his curate, who were now nervously entering, had not finally committed themselves. Then the organ ceased playing, the vicar, who was plucking at his surplice, hastily glanced at my father, and the curate, whom I had never seen paler, tremblingly embarked upon the service.

Pale as was the curate, however, and staccato

as was the utterance, he was the very embodiment of self-confidence compared with the vicar when the latter first approached the lectern under the steadfast gaze of my dear father; and I have seldom seen the consciousness of guilt take such visible toll of an alleged Xtian clergyman as when this weak prelate staggered from his corner and clung tottering to Carkeek's eagle. Nor had I perceived until then—or not so fully—the profound wisdom that had been my father's in concealing from these men the exact moment at which he intended to make his protest. For they were thus proceeding in the devastating knowledge that at any syllable they might be cut short, and publicly arraigned before the whole congregation for their base act of betrayal.

In spite of my anxiety, therefore, I could scarcely suppress a smile, and I was glad to observe, as I glanced at my father, that he was once more in complete command both of himself and the situation. Indeed I had never heard him in such stupendous voice as during the hymn that preceded the sermon, and it was obvious that the vicar conceived this to be the prelude to the actual deliverance of the indictment. It was at any rate some moments before he was able to speak, and I have never, I think, heard a more pitiable noise than the quivering tones in which he uttered the

words of Jeremiah: "Mine heritage is unto me as a speckled bird."*

Spoken by the prophet, he said, under conditions of considerable stress—and who had known more stress than the prophet Jeremiah?—it might also be rendered, as the margin so beautifully reminded us, as a bird having talons. Mine heritage is unto me as a bird having talons—here he paused for a moment, avoiding my father's eye—or might he not say, perhaps, using the plural, *our* heritage is a bird having talons? For in this great gift, this unique gift, that few of us could have failed, he thought, to have noticed, we were all participators, even the most degraded of us, thanks to the generosity of Mr. Carkeek. Yes, it was indeed *our* heritage, *ours*, a speckled bird, a bird having talons. And who could say that the care-stricken prophet had not foreseen this beautiful lectern?

For it was a beautiful lectern—few, he thought, could deny this—this speckled bird, this bird having talons. And yet it might well be that, owing to its very unexpectedness, it should give rise to differing opinions. Nay, he would go further. He would hope that it might, for they were all there, he trowed, in a double capacity—as human beings, overflowing with gratitude, but

* Jeremiah xii. 9.

also as trustees for the church's furniture.

Yes, they were trustees. They must never forget that. That was a distinction that he would have them remember. They were not only human beings, but they were churchmen and trustees — church-beings, trustees and human men — yea, and women also, churchees and trust-men; furniture-women, church-trusts and humanees. They were all those things, and they would remember the old saying, so many men, so many opinions. Thus it might be argued—and very reasonably argued—that the present reading-desk was sufficient, and that the very magnificence of this noble bird might a little detract from its holy purpose. As for that, the congregation must judge. He would welcome the opinion of each one of them. There was not one of them whose opinion he would not welcome, even the lowliest and most sinful. For though our heritage had come unto us as a speckled bird, as a bird having talons, it did not necessarily follow that it was our Xtian duty to take it up and enter into it. Many great men, as they were doubtless aware, had given up heritages of considerable value, and who should say that they had not been actuated by the highest and most holy considerations? But others like Esau had lived to regret it. It was a matter for the congregation to decide,

united though they would be in their undying appreciation of the splendid munificence of Mr. Carkeek. A speckled bird, a bird having talons—let them not lightly discard their heritage. But let them not, on the other hand, too lightly accept it as a bird of no moment. Then, with obvious relief, and indeed a certain amount of complacence, he hurriedly backed down the pulpit steps, just as the curate, leaping to his feet, gave out the number of the closing hymn.

But my father was not perturbed. Throughout the whole service, indeed, he had sat there expressionless as a sphinx, but none the less terrible, because his unwinking eyes had given no hint of their ultimate purpose. Then he rose to his feet, carrying his offertory plate, and it was only in the very deliberateness with which he did so that the most discerning might have gathered a hint, perhaps, of the stupendous judgment about to fall from him. Nor did he allow the task, which was now so imminent, to interfere with his usual custom of joining in the hymn to his uttermost capacity as he moved from pew to pew collecting the offertory.

But the great moment was now close at hand, and I could not forbear turning for a moment in my place and glancing down the aisle at the procession of sidesmen, already formed and wait-

ing my father's signal. For from now onwards even I myself was a little uncertain of my father's intentions, although I did not apprehend that he would begin his denunciation before the last of the sidesmen had yielded up his plate. Then I glanced at the vicar, who had come to the chancel steps; at the curate, who was plucking at his stole; and finally at the bird, with its brazen eye fixed as before on my approaching father. For the hymn had come to an end now and the procession was in motion, with my father in the van carrying his plate, followed by Alexander Carkeek, Mr. Balfour Whey, Mr. Meatson, Cosmo and Corkran. Slowly they proceeded, with Mr. Carkeek, as usual, chafing at the necessity of having to march second, but obviously intoxicated with pride and self-satisfaction as the people in the pews craned their heads to look at him. So disgusting indeed did I find the spectacle that I was obliged for some seconds to close my eyes, and it was during this brief interval that there happened the awful thing that was finally to shatter my father's health. For when I opened them again, pale and petrified, it was once more to behold my father caught and transfixed and stertorously advancing into the same ingenious and devilish trap.

But now it was too late, though I gave a great

cry, and yet that cry, perhaps, may have modified the disaster. For at the last instant, as though he had half-regained consciousness, my father swerved a little to the right, albeit only to stumble and fall at full length over the southwest talons of the pedestal. And yet even then the sidesman in him remained uppermost. For though a half-crown had been jerked from his plate, he never let this go until he had safely grounded it at the very feet of the vicar. Nay, he rose higher. For observing that the half-crown was hurrying towards a grating at the end of the transept, and perceiving that Corkran Carkeek, obeying his family's instinct, had suddenly leapt forward and was hastening after it, he bade me try and secure it before the young Caledonian had succeeded in capturing it for his own box.

"But your poor self?" I cried.

"Never mind me," he said, "or he'll get his foot on that half-crown."

And it was then, and only then, that he yielded to Nature with shriek after shriek of unutterable pain.

It was an astounding moment. For there were thus two spectacles competing for the attention of the congregation, most of whom had now risen and were standing on their seats in the natural desire to observe events. For in the first place

there was my father, writhing on his abdomen at the foot of the lectern, and in the second there were Corkran and myself engaged in the bitterest of races to save and recapture the half-crown. Nor did I win. For though I managed to overtake him, he got his boot upon it at the last moment, just as I had stooped and was about to lift it up at the very brink of the grating. Choking as I was, however, and in spite of his exceptional height, I was able to look him full in the collar and assure him that from that moment I should cease to number him amongst even the most distant of my acquaintances. Then, dumb with wrath and blinded with tears, I managed to swing round upon my heels just as the remaining sidesmen, assisted by the vicar and curate, succeeded in raising my poor father.

But the ordeal was not over. Nay, it had hardly begun. For not only did they drop him in the south transept, but they dropped him a second time in the side aisle, and again upon the threshold of the vestry. Whether this was intentional will never be known, or not until that Day when all shall be made clear. But I cannot help mentioning that the Carkeeks were among the bearers, and that I had never seen the curate looking so cheerful.

CHAPTER XIII

Description of the injuries sustained by my father. A supremely difficult medical problem. Legal assistance of Mr. Balfour Whey. Infamous decisions and public comments. A quiet church and obliging clergy. Surprising character-growth of Ezekiel. A distasteful proposition generously put forward. Disgusting behaviour of a show-room manager.

SUCH, then, was the incident that not only, as I have said, finally destroyed my father's health, but was also destined, after several weeks of the profoundest physical inconvenience, and almost as many months of the acutest legal anxiety, to deprive him (and ultimately myself) of the greater portion of his savings. For it was obvious from the outset that the matter had to be challenged—and indeed we had so pledged ourselves before the ambulance bore him from the vestry—at whatever cost to ourselves and our friends, and before as many tribunals as might prove necessary; and it has often seemed to me that it was only this sacred obligation that preserved my father from immediate extinction. For not only was it discovered by the three doctors, who were immediately summoned to attend upon him, that his right knee was displaying evidences

of incipient synovitis, but the three falls, to which he had been subjected between the lectern and the vestry, had resulted in extremely severe contusions of both his larger gluteal muscles.

The problem before the physicians was thus an exceptionally difficult one. For while the condition of his knee demanded that he should lie upon his back, that of his gluteal muscles was even more imperative in demanding a position precisely opposed to this. After a considerable argument, therefore, it was finally decided that for the first week or ten days the position to be assumed should be a face-downwards one, with a protective cage over the contused muscles. By this means any painful pressure that might have been exerted by the bed-clothes was avoided—an additional protection being afforded by two discs of lint, previously spread with a cooling ointment. For the purposes of nourishment, which was to be ample and sustaining, my father was then to be drawn towards the end of the bed, his head being allowed to project to a sufficient distance to permit of nutriment being inserted from below. Owing to his weight, this, of course, necessitated the erection of a pulley with straps passing under his arm-pits, a return pulley with straps passing round his ankles coming into play at the end of each meal. Even with such assistance, however,

my poor father's plight remained an exceedingly deplorable one; and it is scarcely to be wondered at that, from time to time, he betrayed a marked irritability.

Prostrate as he was, however, and already conscious that his career as a sidesman was definitely over, he flung himself almost immediately, and with all the energy left to him, into the necessary preliminaries of the approaching litigation. Day after day, even while still lying on his abdomen, he held prolonged interviews with Mr. Balfour Whey, who most considerately lay beneath my father's bed, parallel with the sufferer and looking up into his face. Whether, in the world's history, an action of such importance—for it was fully reported in most of the daily newspapers—was ever arranged in similar circumstances I do not know, although I doubt it. But I have certainly never seen a spectacle more solemn and pathetic than that of these two earnest and horizontal men vertically discussing, across the end of the bedstead, the possible methods of legal procedure.

Nor was either to blame for the iniquitous judgments, into the details of which I do not propose to enter, but which had the effect, as I have already stated, of seriously impoverishing my poor father. For from the outset Mr. Balfour

Whey, although sharing to the full in my father's indignation, was explicit as to the difficulty that would certainly accrue in translating this into a legal victory. Indeed the only vehicle under which proceedings could possibly be instituted was the original and extremely crude Employers' Liability Act,* and this upon the doubtful assumption of the applicability of Sub-section (1) of Section 1, and subject to the further acceptance of the Carkeek lectern as a portion of the plant of St. James-the-Least-of-All. Under this earlier Act, too, the status of the vicar as employer and that of his sidesmen as employes was far less substantiable in law than it would have been under the Workmen's Compensation Act; and deeply as I have always regretted, on general grounds, the inclusion of this latter measure in our legal machinery, I have equally deplored that it was not then available to assist my poor father in his heroic crusade.

From the beginning, therefore, it was an unequal contest, with the dice of evasion loaded against my father, and all the forces of idolatry, spite, and ambition arrayed to defeat the course of justice. Thus, despite the arguments—and I have never listened to longer or more powerful ones—of the celebrated counsel that my father

* 43 and 44 Vic. cap 42 (1880).

employed; despite the photographs—and I have never seen any more heart-rending—of the contused areas of my father's person; and despite the irrepressible applause from Simeon and myself that greeted his every reply in the witness-box, the case was not only decided against him with costs, on a series of the most palpable legal quibbles, but an appeal to a higher court met with a similarly scandalous and financially devastating result. Obviously primed, too, by the Carkeeks—although our detectives were unable to prove this—the verdict in each case became the subject of a malicious article in the *Camberwell Observer*, my father once more having to bear the total costs of the prosecutions that immediately ensued.

Nor did a printed appeal to the congregation of St. James-the-Least-of-All bring my poor father more than eight shillings, although the cost of its printing and subsequent postage had amounted to no less than three pounds. Moreover—and even now the pen shakes in my hand as I force it to write the shameful words—not only was the lectern retained in the church (where it may probably be seen at this moment), but within less than a year Cosmo and Corkran Carkeek were the sons of the vicar's churchwarden. It was perhaps the bitterest stab of the whole squalid

conspiracy. But my father was then too enfeebled for active resistance.

"Let it be enough," he wrote to Alexander Carkeek, "until at a Greater Bar you shall stand condemned, that you know, and I know, and so does your vicar, that you have committed simony in your heart."

So ended an episode with which I have dealt thus fully—at what a cost can well be imagined—partly because, as I have said, the contemporary newspaper accounts of it were either misleading or deliberately spiteful, but chiefly because it was the means adopted by Providence of uniting us still more closely with the Stools. That this was an end possible of achievement otherwise, I have never disguised my private opinion. But since it was to lead to my own ultimate matrimony, I have always considered it best to suspend judgment; and I cannot but feel convinced that my readers will share the relief with which I now begin to approach this distant event.

For it was still distant. Let there be no mistake about that. And in the particular form in which it was about to be adumbrated, I ought not to conceal, perhaps, that for several years I found it extremely distasteful. Nevertheless, it came about, and even when Ezekiel first suggested it, deeply repugnant though the idea seemed to me,

I could not help recognizing and suitably acknowledging the generosity with which it had been put forward.

“Dear Augustus,” he said, “each of my sisters will receive an equal portion of my father’s estate, and if it would be any help to you, I should be only too glad to give you one of them in marriage.”

This was on the Sunday evening, I remember, the sixth after we had lost our action against the *Camberwell Observer*, and the seventeenth after my father had been mulcted in costs by the infamous judgment of the Court of Appeal—upon which we had decided, after careful investigation, to transfer our worship to St. Nicholas, Newington Butts. A quiet edifice, devoid of a lectern, yet within a few yards of the tram-lines, it had seemed to us both, although it had various drawbacks, as suitable a receptacle as we should be likely to find for the very modified degree of worship of which my father now remained capable.

“After what has happened,” he said, “it is, of course, a subject in which I can scarcely be expected to take much further interest. But the church appears clean and its clergy seem obliging, if not particularly intelligent.”

Making it quite clear, therefore, that he would

be entirely unable to accept any position of responsibility, and that his attendances, even as an ordinary worshipper, would almost certainly be precarious, my father had added his name to its list of clients, to which I had been very happy to subscribe my own. This we had done verbally, at the close of the morning service, to the obvious satisfaction of the vicar and his curate, Ezekiel having been absent, as his sisters had informed me, owing to a mild attack of gastro-enteritis. At the evening service, however, he was present as usual, and it was upon our way home together after its close that I told him of the decision to which my father and I had come, and of which we had already apprised the clergy. Transported with delight, he shook me by the hand, the hairs upon his face sparkling with happy tears, and I shall never forget the emotion with which he expressed his hope that this would complete the intimacy between us.

"Drawn together," he said, "in the *A.D.S.U.* and by your memorable salvation of me on the fifth of November, and further united in the misfortunes that have befallen the fathers of us both, surely this must be the link that shall finally unite us in a firm and irrevocable friendship."

Deeply moved, I was unable to reply for a moment. But presently, in a response of some

duration, I contrived to signify my general agreement with the aspirations that he had enunciated. He then invited me to share a second evening meal with himself, his mother and his five sisters, and it was during the progress of this that I first became aware of a new development of his character. Hitherto, as I have said, of an extremely gentle and even yielding disposition, he had now assumed, with a dignity and completeness that both surprised and delighted me, not only the headship of the table, but the full direction of the household. Thus when Faith ventured upon a remark that, on a week-day, might have been considered humorous, he at once reminded her that it was the Sabbath and gently but firmly demanded an apology; while a look from his eye was sufficient to quell Hope, who inadvertently "hiccuped" during the pronouncement of grace. I was glad to observe, too, that these facially unattractive girls all remained seated until he had indicated that they might rise, and that together with their mother they instantly left the room when he inclined his head toward the door.

So effective, indeed, was his assumption of his father's duties that I could not refrain from congratulating him, and it was during the conversation that naturally followed that he supplied me

with details of the family finances. Thus I learned from him that, prior to his admission to the Home of Rest in which he was now detained, his father had been persuaded by his legal advisers to retire from the management of the Adult Gripe Water; and that the right to manufacture this, together with the existing plant, had been sold to a limited company. As the sole proprietor, Mr. Abraham Stool had received a considerable sum of money, half of this having been paid to him in cash and the remainder in shares of the new company. The cash had then been invested, upon his solicitor's advice, in colonial and Government securities, and a will drawn up of which Ezekiel was kind enough to give me the exact particulars. Then he paused for a moment, and it was then, leaning towards me with the utmost affection, that he uttered the words of which, as I have already recorded, I could not but recognize the good feeling.

"And so you see, dear Augustus, each of my sisters will receive an equal portion of my father's estate, and if it would be any help to you, I should be only too glad to give you one of them in marriage."

Admirably meant, however, as was this offer, and obviously one of considerable value, few could have blamed me, I think, for the instinctive

shudder with which I was obliged at first to postpone an answer. Nor was he one of them.

"In fact, I never supposed," he said, "that you could immediately bring yourself to accept. And I fully appreciate that, had I been in your position, my gesture of repulsion would have been equally violent. But at the same time I thought it might be useful to you to know that they would be there to fall back upon."

I stared at him.

"To fall back upon?" I asked.

Colouring deeply, he held out his hand.

"I was speaking metaphorically," he said. "I beg your pardon."

"Conceded," I replied. "But it was an unpleasant idea."

"And an ill-chosen phrase," he said. "All that I meant was that they would be there for you to select from."

"Do you mean all of them?" I asked.

He signified his assent.

"Subject to the Great Reaper," he said, "I think that I can promise that."

Then for five minutes we sat in silence, and then, extending my hand to him, I rose to my feet.

"Ezekiel," I said, "I am not unobliged to you, and although I could never view such a marriage

with enthusiasm, yet I can conceive circumstances in which, as a last resort, it might be my duty to consider it."

"Precisely," he said, "and it is for such a contingency that I shall be only too glad, as I have said, to reserve them."

Then we parted, Ezekiel, as he afterwards told me, to the happy contemplation of our closer friendship, and myself, as I walked home, to the sombre consideration of the possibilities with which I had been presented. I had scarcely been so occupied, however, for ten minutes when I suddenly became aware of the odour of alcohol, and to my infinite horror found myself being embraced by the show-room manager from Paternoster Row.

"Why, ShAugustus," he said. "Fansheen you."

Involuntarily I recoiled from him, but he came after me.

"Fansheen you," he repeated. "Hahu?"

And having kissed me, he sat down on the pavement.

CHAPTER XIV

Person and character of Mr. Archibald Maidstone. Irreverent attitude towards the firm's publications. Would-be laxity of two constables. Their tardy performance of an obvious duty. Deplorable condition of my Sunday trousers. Their effect on Miss Botterill and Mr. Chrysostom Lorton. The arrival and influence of the Reverend Eugene Cake. Mr. Maidstone is dismissed and I succeed him. Complete discomfiture of his three elder children.

I HAVE said that he sat down, and even had that been all, it would have been a sufficiently unpleasant encounter, although, as I had instantly seen, it ought certainly to issue in my own immediate commercial advancement. But he did more, for so firmly did he grip my arm that I was compelled to sit down beside him, with what reluctance will be the better imagined when I have briefly described his person and character. By name Archibald Maidstone, he was a tall, gaunt man with high cheek-bones and a grey moustache, and in his earlier life he had held some sort of position in the British mercantile marine. An accident at sea, however, had deprived him of one of his eyes as well as of the two middle fingers of his left hand, and for some time he had been the proprietor of a small and

unsuccessful marine store. He had then become a commercial traveller for a firm of grocers that had subsequently failed, and had finally, at the age of forty-one, obtained a minor position in the business of Mr. Chrysostom Lorton.

A married man with several children, he had afterwards been appointed show-room manager, and it was as his assistant, as I have already said, that I had entered Mr. Lorton's employment. From the outset, however, although I had endeavoured to conceal this, I had both disliked and distrusted him, and in spite of what I presumed to be a species of nautical humour, I had found his attitude towards me peculiarly offensive. I had never been accustomed, for example, as I had been obliged to point out to him, to be addressed as "young-feller-me-lad," or "the bosun's mate," and I had even been compelled to report him to Mr. Lorton in order to secure more respectful treatment. I had been deeply concerned, too, to observe the levity with which, in the absence of customers, he would handle and describe the sacred publications of which it was his privilege to be the salesman. "Bilge-water for the Bairns," for instance, was a frequent expression of his for our well-known series of *Talks with the Infants*, and I had even heard him refer to a parcel of *Claudie's Temptations* as

“another half-hundredweight of the Prigs’ Paradise.” Indeed, on one occasion, ignorant of the presence of the author—the celebrated Non-conformist, the Reverend Eugene Cake—he had tossed me a window-copy of *Without are Dogs*, saying that, if they were “wise bow-wows,” they would stay there; and it was only after a second interview with Mr. Chrysostom Lorton, the tearful intervention of Mrs. Maidstone, and a complete apology to the Reverend Cake, that he was allowed to retain his position.

But for the fact, indeed, that his children were still at school and dependent upon his earnings, and that his wife, who seemed inexplicably attached to him, had been an invalid for some years, he would most certainly have been dismissed, and I had always felt that this should have been done. Nor was I alone in this, for when I ventured to congratulate him on the successful sale of *Without are Dogs*, the Reverend Cake had entirely agreed with me in deploring Mr. Maidstone’s retention in the business.

Such, then, was the man by whose side I was now sitting upon the damp pavement, and from whom I only detached myself after a prolonged struggle, just as a member of the police force came in sight. This was a stalwart constable of somewhat coarse appearance to whom I immedi-

ately made myself known, and to whose attention I then brought Mr. Maidstone, who was still seated upon the pavement.

"Ha, I see," he said, "a bit sideways. Do you happen to know where the gentleman lives?"

"I don't know the street," I said, "nor can I accept your assumption that such a degenerate can be called a gentleman. But I understand that his home is in Greenwich."

"Num shixteen," said Mr. Maidstone.

The constable bent over him, and raised him to his feet.

"Now, come along," he said. "Pull yourself together."

Mr. Maidstone swayed for a moment and then saluted us.

"Happit meetu," he said. "Num shixteen."

"Sixteen what?" said the constable.

"Manshtroad," said Mr. Maidstone. "Shixteen Manshtroad, Grinsh."

Then he toppled forward into the constable's arms, but recovered himself and smiled at us affectionately.

The constable turned to me.

"Well, if I was you, sir, I'd put him in a cab and take him home."

I stared at him in utter amazement.

"But do you mean to say," I inquired, "that

you aren't going to take him in charge?"

"Oh, no need, sir," he said, "seeing as you know the gentleman—not if you'll put him into a cab and take him home."

"But, my good man," I said, "how can I do that? It's a quarter past ten, and I'm going home to bed."

"Well, we can't leave him here," said the constable, "or he'll be getting into trouble. What about givin' 'im a 'and to your own 'ouse, sir?"

"To my own house?" I cried. "A person in that condition?"

The constable pushed his helmet back and scratched his forehead.

"Well, it'd be doin' 'im a good turn, sir," he said, "seein' as 'ow the gentleman's a friend of yours."

"On the contrary," I said, "he's neither a friend of mine, nor do I suppose to condone his infamy."

Here Mr. Maidstone caught hold of the constable.

"Shinfamous thing," he said. "Carncondonit."

Then he sat down again and began to sing a hymn, just as a second constable came round the corner; and after conferring for a moment, they

approached me once more with the suggestion that they should conduct Mr. Maidstone to Angela Gardens.

"You see, sir," they said, "we don't want to make no trouble, and maybe some day you'll want a 'and yourself."

For a moment, so casually were the words spoken, I scarcely realized their astounding import. But when I did so, it was, of course, instantly clear to me that I must define my position once and for all. Drawing myself up, therefore, I addressed the two constables with all the firmness of which I was capable.

"You have chosen to be insolent," I said, "and for that you may rest assured I shall report you to your superiors at my earliest convenience. But I must have you understand, now and for ever, and beyond all possibility of future cavil, that I entirely and absolutely refuse to associate myself with any evasion of the law of this land. This person, whose name is Archibald Maidstone, who is employed by Mr. Chrysostom Lorton of Paternoster Row, and whose home, if I have interpreted him rightly, is in Manchester Road, Greenwich, is not only drunk, but, as his actions have proclaimed him, is also disorderly in every sense. As a Xtian gentleman, therefore, no less than as a citizen, whose trousers have been soiled

by his agency, I demand you that you shall do your duty by removing him to the appropriate place of detention. And I would further have you note that I am aware of both your numbers and shall certainly inform myself of your procedure."

"Hear, hear," said Mr. Maidstone, "more. Thashway talk to 'em. Manshtroad, Grinsh."

Then the constables conferred again, and stooping over Mr. Maidstone, lifted him once more from the pavement.

"Very good, sir," they said, "if you can't see your way to look after him, we shall have to take him to the station."

I bowed to them coldly.

"Since that was so plainly your duty," I said, "I can only regret your tardy perception of it."

It will thus be seen that, harassed as I was by the problem provided for me by Ezekiel Stool, I was now confronted with the much more immediate one of purging Mr. Lorton's business of Mr. Archibald Maidstone. For to me, at any rate, it was imperatively clear that such a person could not possibly remain in it without imperiling the whole of the spiritual prestige that was perhaps its most lucrative asset. At the same time, however, as I also saw, the preliminaries to expulsion would require very careful handling,

owing to the choleric temper, the extreme vanity, and the peculiar limitations of Mr. Chrysostom himself.

After what can well be imagined, therefore was a restless night, and not without the profoundest consideration, I decided upon the seat of my Sunday trousers as the best introduction to the subject in hand; and it was with this in view that I refrained from dusting or drying them and carried them to the city with me the next morning.

Nor was I disappointed. For not only did Miss Botterill, my female inferior, visibly recoil from them, but they instantly caught the eye of Mr. Chrysostom Lorton as he crossed the show-room on the way to his office. Indeed, disposed as they were, with the seat uppermost, upon one corner of the right-hand counter, it would have been difficult for even the most preoccupied to have passed them without notice, and especially as the moisture that had been transferred to them from the pavement was now being illuminated by the morning sun. Nor was the effect of them upon Mr. Chrysostom Lorton less than it had been upon Miss Botterill. Starting back, almost as if he had been lassoed, he stood for a moment staring at them with dilated pupils, and then very softly he approached them on tiptoe with the

point of his umbrella extended before him.

"Good God," he said, "whose are those?"

With an appropriate gesture I signified their ownership. He turned to Miss Botterill.

"Fetch me a chair," he said.

She pushed one towards him with averted eyes. He fell back into it and waved his hand.

"Take them away," he said. "Put them somewhere else."

I removed them from the counter and placed them underneath it.

"Where's Mr. Maidstone?" he said.

I replied that he had not come.

"I imagine," I said, "that he has been detained."

"Detained?" he cried. "Why should he be detained? What should have detained him? It's ten past nine."

"Even so," I replied.

"Then kindly inform me," he went on, "why you have taken advantage of his absence."

I looked at him gravely.

"I am not aware," I said, "of having done any such thing."

"Not aware?" he said. "Not aware, sir? Where's Miss Botterill? Put this chair back."

He rose to his feet and stood glaring at me, still pointing his umbrella at the counter.

"Then do you mean to tell me," he said, "that if Mr. Maidstone had been present, your disgusting wearing apparel would still have been there?"

I bowed my head.

"I cannot say," I replied. "But it was to call his attention to them that I had placed them on the counter."

He lowered his umbrella.

"To call his attention to them? But what has Mr. Maidstone to do with your trousers?"

"In this particular case," I said, "a very great deal, since he was solely responsible for their condition."

He opened his mouth.

"Mr. Maidstone?" he gasped.

"Mr. Archibald Maidstone," I said, "your show-room manager."

"But good God," he said, "you don't mean to tell me that he's in the habit of borrowing your trousers?"

"Unfortunately," I replied, "that was not necessary. I was myself occupying them on the occasion in question."

"But I don't understand," he said. "Where's Miss Botterill? Bring me that chair back. I want to sit down."

She brought back the chair, and just as she did so, the street door opened to admit a newcomer—

none other, indeed, than the Reverend Eugene Cake, bearing the type-script of his new novel.*

It was an important entrance. But Mr. Chrysostom still sat staring at the counter, and having greeted Mr. Cake rather perfunctorily, demanded a further inspection of the trousers. Once again, therefore, I placed them upon the counter, and once again Miss Botterill recoiled, the Reverend Eugene Cake recoiling also and dropping the type-script of his novel.

"Now," said Mr. Chrysostom, "you have already informed me that you were encased in these nauseating garments, and you have further asserted that Mr. Maidstone was solely responsible for their present condition. Mr. Maidstone, you tell me, is probably detained somewhere, and it is now a quarter past nine. I may be unintelligent. I may be obtuse. I may be unfit to conduct this business. But I don't understand it, sir. I don't understand it. Where's Miss Botterill? Get Mr. Cake a chair."

With her hand over her face, Miss Botterill ran across the show-room and returned with a chair for Mr. Cake. Mr. Chrysostom glanced at him.

"Are you comfortable, Cake?"

The Reverend Eugene bowed a little stiffly.

* *Gnashers of Teeth.*

"Very well, then," said Mr. Chrysostom. "Very well, I repeat. And now you must explain, sir. You must explain. I don't want to pre-judge you. I never pre-judge anybody. But I don't like it, sir. I don't like it. And you must allow me to remind you that this is not the first time that you have obliged me to discuss your trousers."

"Sir," I replied, "I am deeply aware of it, and none can regret it more than myself, nor the painful circumstances that you have, I think justly, now compelled me to disclose."

I then very briefly, but with all essential details, described my encounter with Mr. Maidstone, concluding with the numbers of the two constables and a surmise that he was being detained to see the magistrate.

When I had finished, Mr. Chrysostom was breathing heavily, while Mr. Cake was engaged in silent prayer. Then they both rose and stood with their backs to the trousers while Mr. Chrysostom gave his orders.

"Miss Botterill," he said, "when Mr. Maidstone arrives, you will please request him to come to my room. Mr. Carp, having removed your trousers, you will kindly take charge of the show-room."

Colouring deeply, Mr. Cake touched him on

the arm. "I suppose you refer," he said, "to the trousers on the counter."

"Eh, what?" said Mr. Chrysostom. "Yes, yes, of course. The trousers on the counter. You didn't suppose——?"

"I endeavoured not to," said Mr. Cake. "But perhaps it would have been better to be more explicit."

Slightly ruffled, however, as was the eminent novelist by the occasion and manner of his reception, he was completely emphatic, as he afterwards assured me, on the necessity for dismissing Mr. Maidstone; and indeed Mr. Chrysostom, as he also informed me, had needed very little in the way of persuasion.

"In fact, I think I may say," he said, a couple of hours later, as he passed through the show-room on his way to the street, "that *Gnashers of Teeth* will find a good friend in Mr. Maidstone's successor."

I clasped his hand.

"I sincerely hope so," I said.

"It's even more powerful," he said, "than *Without are Dogs*."

It was in this fashion, then, that I became show-room manager with an added, though insufficient emolument, for Mr. Maidstone, when he arrived the next morning, was at once dis-

missed after a brief interview. Explaining at first that he had failed to attend owing to a very violent bilious headache, he was, of course, unable, when pressed by Mr. Chrysostom, to deny the truth of my allegations; and it subsequently emerged that, after a night in the police station, he had been fined ten shillings by the local magistrate. Nor did his resentment, when he came downstairs again, assume the physical character that I had feared, although I had taken the precaution of keeping Miss Botterill beside me and holding my police whistle in my left hand. On the contrary, he seemed to recognize not only the grossness of his delinquency, but the inevitable nature of the consequences that had so rightly ensued.

"Well, you've done me in, laddie," he said. "But I suppose I deserved it."

"I regret to say," I replied, "that there can be no doubt of it."

"But it's going to be hard," he added, "on the wife and family."

"The wages of sin," I said, "are never easy."

Then Miss Botterill sniffed and pulled out her handkerchief, and Mr. Maidstone closed the street door, and but for a diverting sequel upon the following Friday, the incident closed very satisfactorily. Upon that morning, however, Mr.

Maidstone's three elder children, a girl and two boys, all apparently under fourteen, entered the show-room and peremptorily demanded to be taken upstairs to Mr. Chrysostom Lorton. By names, Polly, Arthur, and George, they had come to apply for their father's reinstatement, chiefly, as they alleged, on account of their mother, whom they described as suffering from pulmonary consumption. Needless to say, much to their obvious discomfiture, Mr. Chrysostom refused to see them, and after a brief consultation, they filed out again very much more humbly than they had come in. Unpleasant children, it was an amusing episode, and I could not help laughing somewhat heartily, although Polly, who appeared to be the eldest, made a grimace at me as she went out.

CHAPTER XV

Happy years. A typical day. Simeon Whey is at last ordained. His first sermon at St. Sepulchre's, Balham. Intensive campaign of the *A.D.S.U.* I meet Miss Moonbeam and call her Mary. Affecting appeal not to leave her in darkness. I promise not to do so. A face to lean on. Will I come again? Adventure on the stage of the Empresses Theatre.

I HAVE said that this incident ended satisfactorily, but, as I shall very shortly have to demonstrate, it was subsequently to become associated with what I have always regarded as the most tragic event of my career—an event so annihilating in its ultimate consequences, and so misunderstood in its immediate details, that few less proven and resilient characters could have emerged from it unimpaired. Nor could my physique, I think, have stood the strain but for the four or five years that now intervened, during which I was enabled, in a life of comparative calm, to add very considerably to my bodily weight. Indeed in many respects, uneventful as they were, these were amongst the happiest years of my earlier manhood, and I cannot do better, perhaps, than describe for the benefit of my readers a typical day of this period of my life.

Required, like my father, who was still fortunately able to pursue his secular avocations,

to be present at my place of employment by nine o'clock in the morning, my mother would call me at a quarter past seven, bringing a cup of tea to my bedside. This I would permit to cool for three or four minutes while I ate one of the biscuits with which it was accompanied; and then, sitting up in bed with my dressing-gown over my shoulders, I would drink the upper half of it before again eating. I would then eat the second of my two biscuits, and having drunk the remainder of the tea, would ring for my mother, who would then bring my hot water prior to the removal of the tea-things.

I was now ready to dress, and pushing down the bed-clothes, would begin by leaning forward and reaching the trousers which, the night before, I had hung over the end of the bed, with this very purpose in view. Containing my pants, to the lower extremities of which my socks would be still adherent, I was thus enabled, without removing my nightgown, to clothe my lower limbs before actually rising; and it was only then that I would finally leave the bed and cross the room towards the wash-hand stand. I would then fill the basin, leaving sufficient hot water for the purposes of subsequent shaving, and having locked the door and drawn the blinds would remove my nightgown preparatory to washing.

It would now be half-past seven, and if it were at all cold, I would don my vest before bending over the basin, never failing, however, in even the severest weather, to roll up my sleeves as far as my elbows. Then having dried and put on my shirt, I would shave before putting on my shirt-front, always brushing my hair before I put on my coat, but not before putting on my waistcoat. I would then select a clean handkerchief from my top right-hand drawer, and having pulled up my trousers a little to prevent them from becoming baggy, would kneel by my bedside at seven forty-five, assuming an erect position again at five minutes to eight. I would then pull up the blinds, open the windows, fold up my nightgown and put it in my nightgown bag, and by eight o'clock would be sitting at the harmonium in readiness to burst into the morning hymn.

Thus begun, and breakfast having been concluded, the day would next behold me inside an omnibus, unless the weather were warm enough to permit of my sitting upon the top for the purpose of rebuking adjacent smokers; and punctually at nine o'clock, I would enter the show-room and divest myself of my hat, scarf and overcoat. I would then exchange a courteous word or two with Miss Botterill and the youth who had succeeded me as show-room assistant,

and immediately apply myself to the various duties that as show-room manager devolved upon my shoulders. Comprising the arrangement of books upon the shelves and counters, as well as of an attractive display in the street window, these would include, of course, my personal attendance upon the more important of our retail customers, the booking of orders, the checking of the show-room takings, and the maintenance of discipline amongst my two subordinates. And I had long ago proved the necessity, in view of such diverse demands, of paying the utmost attention to my physical upkeep.

At eleven o'clock, therefore, I would despatch Miss Botterill to a neighbouring branch of the Aerated Bread Company for a glass of hot milk and a substantial slice of a cake appropriately known as lunch cake. I would then, at twelve-thirty, repair in person to the same branch of this valuable company, where I would generally order from one of the quieter waitresses a double portion of sausages and mashed potatoes, accompanied by a cup of coffee, and followed by an apple dumpling or a segment of baked jam roll. This was the more necessary because the hour from one to two was usually the busiest of the working day, while from two to three, when my subordinates lunched in turn, I had, of course,

only one of them to assist me.

By three o'clock, however, they had both returned, and I would take the opportunity, five minutes later, of again sending Miss Botterill to the Aerated Bread Company for my mid-afternoon cup of tea. This I would drink, unthickened by food, but at half-past four I would send her out for another cup, and with this I would eat a roll and butter, a small dish of honey, and perhaps a single doughnut. Thus fortified I would then continue at work until six o'clock, when the show-room closed, and at half-past six I was sitting down at home to the chief meal of the evening. Taken somewhat earlier than had been my father's custom in the days of my boyhood and adolescence, I had found myself obliged to insist on the alteration in view of the many demands upon my evening hours. Most of my active work, for example, at the doors of public-houses, required an attendance from seven to nine, while few of the local prayer-meetings began at a later hour than half-past seven or eight.

Early as was this meal, however, it was none the less welcome, consisting as it usually did of a joint and two vegetables followed by a wholesome pudding, tea, bread and jam, and perhaps a slice or two of home-made cake. Then after evening prayers, I would embrace my father, who

was now always in bed by a quarter to nine, and leave the house upon some such holy errand as I have described in the previous paragraph. I did not fail, however, on returning home, to drink a bowl of arrowroot and eat some digestive biscuits, and whenever possible, in the interests of my health, I would retire to my bedroom at ten fifteen.

Here I would find my windows closed for the night, the blinds drawn for the sake of decency, a jug of hot water standing in my basin, while a hot-water bottle would be within the bed. All would be in readiness, therefore, for my quick disrobing, a process that I would begin as soon as I had locked the door; and within five minutes, I would be bending over the basin clad as I have described myself some fifteen hours earlier. I would then brush my teeth, using some mild disinfectant, open my nightgown bag and extract my nightgown, and having taken off my vest, would slip on my nightgown prior to the removal of my lower garments. These I would then detach from myself with a single downward movement, subsequently hanging them over the end of the bed, after which I would put on my dressing-gown and bedroom slippers and utter a brief but fervent supplication. I would then pull up the blinds so that the stars could shine upon my bed, swallow

a tablespoonful of the Adult Gripe Water, unlock the door, extinguish the light, and by ten thirty-five be composed for slumber.

Such was a typical day of this period of my life, during which, as I have said, I increased in weight, and in which, as I am glad to believe, my moral stature also expanded and became consolidated. This was, at any rate, the conviction of my friend Simeon Whey, who took the opportunity of my twenty-sixth birthday to describe me in his diary as "now in the full flower of his southern Metropolitan Xtian manhood." Indeed, the whole passage is well worth transcribing, written as it was on the eve of his ordination, and following a happy hour together discussing the price-lists of various clerical tailors.

"By a moving coincidence," he wrote, "the eve of my ordination has coincided with the twenty-sixth birthday of my old and dear friend Augustus Carp of Angela Gardens. And yet perhaps old is scarcely the right word, for mature as he is, he is now in the full flower of his southern Metropolitan Xtian manhood. Nor have I ever seen him looking so large as when he came to see me at 2.35 to receive the hand-painted toothbrush, with which I had promised to present him, and to give me his benediction for the morrow. Fully a stone heavier than this time last year, his

moustache has become noticeably more abundant, and his every movement possesses the weight and gravity of a man twenty years his senior. Admirable as was his diction, too, even as a boy, it has now attained a level of sonorous grandeur, from which it never lapses in even the most trivial pronouncements imposed upon him by necessary human intercourse. Is it surprising, therefore, that I daily thank P,* for so noble and inspiring an example?"

Dear Simeon, loyal and appreciative, for many a long year hadst thou been trying to get ordained, but now thou hadst succeeded, and well do I remember thy first sermon at St. Sepulchre's, Balham. Cast thy bread, thou preachedst, upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days—and mark, thou didst say, it is not demanded of us to cast our jewels or financial securities. No, no, thou saidst, it was well recognized that the former would sink and the latter become unintelligible, whereas bread was nutriment for the fishes of the deep, and in due course would return to our tables. Moreover, bread was cheap, thou didst say, and even the poorest of us was sometimes tempted to waste his bread, and for him there was a message—kck—in these beautiful words to place his bread, as it were, out at

* Providence.

interest. Let us all, then, take heed, thou saidst, never to waste our bread but to collect it earnestly with both hands, and whenever we saw any water, yea, no matter how little, to cast it upon it in faith fearing not. And then it would return to us, if not in the form of fish, then in some other form which we wotted not of. For what was bred in the bone could never be cast down, nay, not until seventy times seven.

Good Simeon, such was thy first sermon, and I doubt if thou hast ever preached a better.

Little as we dreamt it, however, Providence was now hurrying towards me with the heaviest cross of my adult life, a cross so heavy that even now I cannot help shuddering at its weight, and one that compelled me not only to retire from business, but to remove from Camberwell to Stoke Newington. Nor was it less bitter in that the instrument of deposit was a young and exceptionally attractive female, with whom I had been brought into contact in the course of my work for the Anti-Dramatic and Saltatory Union.

This was about a year after Simeon's ordination and soon after I had inaugurated, in my capacity as Vice-President, an intensive campaign of personal exhortation at all the most notorious West End theatres. Thus I had arranged that there should be posted at the

stage entrances of all these more popular haunts of vice earnest young workers of the male sex plentifully provided with the Union's literature. These would then approach the in-coming actors and actresses with a few well-chosen words of warning, pointing out to them the iniquity of their occupation and inviting them to embrace some other profession. Having had our evening meals, Ezekiel and myself would each then visit a group of theatres to encourage our representatives and lend them the personal aid of our riper experience and more gifted oratory.

This, then, was the occasion of my being present at about half-past seven on a January evening at the stage door of the Empresses Theatre, where a play called *The Peach Girl* was about to be performed. This was a drama, accompanied by music, and frequently interrupted, I believe, by amatory dances, which had already been presented nearly three hundred times and was still attracting enormous audiences. I had not myself seen it, but Ezekiel, who had witnessed a considerable portion of it before making his protest at its first performance, had particularly deplored the abbreviated costumes of most of the female dancers. He had made an exception, however, in favour of the principal actress, by whose singular beauty he

had been greatly impressed, and in whom he had discerned, he thought, in spite of her surroundings, an appreciable degree of natural goodness. By name Mary Moonbeam, she had been assigned the part, it appeared, of a quite simple seller of fruit, to whom a naval officer, accompanied upon the stage by a large number of female midshipmen, had immediately begun, in a voluptuous baritone, to address words of affection.

What had happened subsequently Ezekiel did not, of course, know, since he had then made his protest and been compelled to leave. But he had felt assured, from the sweetness of her expression, that she had been more sinned against than sinning, and that in other surroundings she might easily have developed into an almost ideal district visitor. On the other hand, it was quite clear, from the letter-press outside the theatre, that she was the chief attraction of the play, and she had twice refused to discuss her future with our young representative at the stage door.

It was with as open a mind, therefore, as it was at all possible for me to possess in respect of an actress, that I perceived her alighting from an expensive-looking vehicle soon after I had reached the stage door. Nor was I at first able, owing to the speed of her movements—she was ten minutes later, it appeared, than usual—and the volu-

minous furs, in which she had ensconced herself, to obtain a clear view of her face. In fact, when I first touched her, she brushed me aside, and it was only after she had glanced at me a second time that she stopped for a moment and began to stare at me with her exceptionally limpid, hazel eyes.

"Hullo," she said, "you're not the same man."

"I am the Vice-President," I said, "of the Anti-Dramatic Union."

"And Saltatory," she said. "Don't forget the Saltatory part."

"Would that it were possible," I replied. "But it isn't."

She gave a little sigh.

"No, I suppose not," she said, "not with all us girls earning our living by it."

"And hurling others," I said, "to their deaths."

"Oh, no," she said, "not really?"

"Every night," I replied, "in thousands and thousands."

"Oh, good gracious," she said, "not every night?"

I nodded gravely.

"Every night," I said, "in thousands and thousands and thousands and thousands."

"But goodness me," she cried, "that's more than ever."

"It's more and more," I said, "every night."

"Well, I never," she said. "What a fearful mortality."

"Fearful indeed," I replied, "and you are responsible."

"Oh, my aunt," she said, "how perfectly horrible. Can't you come and talk to me after the first act?"

"I should be only too glad," I said, "if you would tell me where to come."

"Oh, anybody'll tell you," she said. "Nineteen."

Then she disappeared, and at a quarter past nine, when I returned to the theatre after consulting Ezekiel, I was eventually shown into a small room, where she appeared to be undressing herself to a marked extent. She waved her hand, however, and bade me take a chair, assuring me that the worst was already over, and introducing me to a woman, whom she described as her dresser, and whose name was Mrs. Montgomery.

"This is Mr. Carp," she said, "the Vice-President of the Anti-Dramatic and Saltatory Union."

Mrs. Montgomery wiped her hands on her apron prior to greeting me with great cordiality.

"Happy to meet you," she said. "I've

read a lot of your tracts, and mark my words, there's a lot of truth in 'em."

"Yes," said Miss Moonbeam, "and isn't it awful, Bags?* He says we kill thousands of people every night."

"Well, I shouldn't wonder," said Mrs. Montgomery, "not for a moment, I shouldn't. What with this modern dancing and all. Hold your chin up, dearie."

She was applying some powder to Miss Moonbeam's neck, and presently stood back a little, eyeing her critically.

"Yes," said Miss Moonbeam. "But oughtn't we to do something? It doesn't seem right just to let it go on."

"Oh, no," I cried. "Nor it is. Nor it is, Miss Moonbeam. Believe me."

"I do," she said. "I do believe you. Get out of the light, Bags. I want to look at him."

For a moment I sat in silence, permitting her to feast her eyes. Then she bent forward a little, holding out her hands.

"Oh, Mr. Carp," she said, "I'm only a poor actress. Help me to be better. Help me to be like you."

Withdrawing my gloves and putting them in my left-hand pocket, I advanced towards her and

* Presumably an abbreviation of Montgomery.

took hold of her hands.

"My dear Miss Moonbeam," I said.

But she looked at me rather pathetically.

"Oh, Mr. Carp," she said, "won't you call me Mary?"

I considered for a moment. It was a difficult position. For though I could not help feeling that she was a little presumptuous, I had to remember that this was probably the first occasion on which she had met a really good man. I therefore decided to grant her petition.

"My dear Mary," I said, "I shall be only too happy."

She breathed a sigh and removed her hands.

"Oh, how lovely of you," she said. "Now I must go on dressing."

"But, my dear Mary," I said, "is that necessary?"

"Oh, I think so," she said. "You see, if I didn't——"

I waved my hand.

"I'm afraid you've misunderstood me," I said.

"Very likely," she said. "I'm so stupid. But you're going to help me, Mr. Carp, aren't you?"

I bowed sympathetically.

"Nothing could please me more," I said, "than to lead you out of darkness into the membership of our Union. But would it not be

better to rise up at once—to rise up at once, I say, and come away?”

But she shook her head.

“You see, I’m bound by a contract,” she said, “and I have to support rather a large family.”

Involuntarily I staggered a little.

“But, Mary,” I cried.

“Brothers and sisters,” she explained. “I’m paying for their education.”

Profoundly relieved, and not a little touched, I regained my equilibrium and invited her to confide in me. Her mother was dead, it appeared, and her father had been unfortunate and was now unable to provide for his children.

“And so they batten,” I said, “on your ill-gotten earnings.”

She turned and looked at me for a moment in silence. Then she smiled again as she put on her slippers.

“You seem to understand things,” she said, “so quickly.”

Then a small boy looked round the door.

“Curtain’s up, miss,” he said, and disappeared again.

“Oh dear, oh dear,” she cried, “how the time flies. Can’t you come and talk to me after the show?”

I smiled at her not unkindly.

"By ten-fifteen," I said, "I shall be in my bedroom."

"But what am I to do?" she said. "I've begun to lean on you. You aren't going to leave me here wallowing?"

I stared at her.

"Wallowing in what?" I asked.

"Why, in the darkness," she said, "killing all those people."

I took her hands again.

"My dear Mary," I said, "it is in order to remove you that I am here."

She gave a little sigh.

"Oh, I was sure I could trust you," she said. "I knew I could trust you, the moment I saw you."

"Yes, it's his face," said Mrs. Montgomery. "Isn't it, dearie? It's one of those faces one wants to lean on."

"Oh yes, yes," she cried, "with all one's weight. Couldn't you bring it round to-morrow after the matinée? And then very likely you'll meet some of my friends, and perhaps you'll be able to remove us all."

"But not before six," I said, "or a quarter past."

"That'll do nicely," she said. "There's my call."

Then she ran from the room, just as an electric bell began to sound in the corner, and Mrs. Montgomery was kind enough to tell me the quickest way to leave the theatre.

Unfortunately, however, she was either inaccurate, or by some odd chance I failed to understand her, for a moment later I found myself on the stage, just as the naval officer was about to embrace Miss Moonbeam. By a curious coincidence, too, my appearance synchronized with the dramatic utterance by Miss Moonbeam of the words, "Hush, Reginald, he comes," which added for the moment to my perplexity. For while it was possible (and this proved to be the case) that the words bore reference to some fellow-actor, it was also possible, I thought, that she might have been informing him of my own presence in the theatre. Nor could I be certain from the attitude of the audience, as it unanimously rose with roars of applause, that my recent efforts to rescue their favourite might not have become known to it and touched its heart. I conceived it my duty, therefore, without prejudicing my position, to make a courteous bow or two before retiring, and I took the opportunity of handing the naval officer an illustrated copy of *Did Wycliffe Waltz?*

CHAPTER XVI

Disappointing attitude of Ezekiel. Suggested nuptials of Miss Moonbeam.

An occasion for tact and postponement. I am obliged to write a letter. Ezekiel accompanies me to the Empresses Theatre. We are a little taken aback by the numbers to be rescued. An apparently delightful beverage. I address Miss Moonbeam's friends on the subject of temperance. Ezekiel addresses them on the evils of the drama. We arrange a meeting. Description of meeting.

AFTERWARDS, as I have suggested, I was to discover in Miss Moonbeam an almost incredible capacity for evil. But that night, as I emerged from the theatre into the anxious arms of Ezekiel Stool, I could not help feeling in the utmost agreement with him as to her character and physical appearance. Indeed so complete was my endorsement both of his judgment and prevision that I must confess to having been a little surprised by his reception of my news.

"So you're meeting her again?" he said.

"Yes, to-morrow evening," I replied, "when I hope to draw closer to her in every way."

He stopped abruptly and began to peer at me suspiciously through the dense tangle that now covered his face.

"How do you mean closer?" he said.

I waved my hand.

"She has so much to learn," I said, "so much to understand. She's like a little child, Ezekiel, just as you supposed—a female child that has never been properly taught."

"Yes, very likely," he said. "But why shouldn't I teach her myself? I'm the president of the Union after all."

"But, my dear Ezekiel," I said, "undoubted as are your gifts both as organizer and financier of our movement, do you really consider that you have quite the personality for such intimate soul-work as Miss Moonbeam requires?"

"Absolutely," said Ezekiel.

"Then I can only say," I replied, "that I fail to agree with you."

It was an awkward moment, and it was not until the third attempt that Ezekiel succeeded in making himself intelligible.

"And so you mean to imply," he said, "that for the purposes of approaching Miss Moonbeam, your personality is superior to mine?"

I touched his arm, not without affection.

"Or shall we rather say," I replied, "that it is more attractive?"

"But I deny it," he cried. "I deny it most passionately. I deny it with every fibre of my being."

I withdrew my glove for a moment from his coat-sleeve.

"But, my dear Ezekiel," I said, "that doesn't alter the position."

"The position?" he said. "What position?"

"Why, the position," I replied, "between Mary and myself."

For a moment the silence was almost terrifying. Then he dropped his umbrella, and I put my foot upon it.

"Between who?" he said. "Between who?"

"Between Mary," I repeated, "and myself."

"But do you mean to tell me," he cried, "that as Vice-President—as Vice-President, I say, of a Union such as ours——"

I touched his sleeve again.

"Or shall we say *an* Union, seeing that Union begins with a vowel?"

But he stamped his foot, evidently losing self-control.

"No, we won't," he screamed. "We won't say *an* Union. Why should we say *an* Union if we don't want to? We don't say *an* Youth or *an* Yew-tree."

"Simply," I replied, "because the two latter words happen to be inaugurated with a consonant."

"But I deny it," he shouted. "I deny it most

passionately. I deny it with every fibre of my being."

For a moment I stood aghast. Hitherto I had been conciliatory. But here was a question upon which there could be no compromise.

"But, Ezekiel Stool," I said, "as man to man—nay, as Xtian gentleman to Xtian gentleman—do you mean to tell me that you are prepared to deny that the word Yew-tree begins with a Y?"

"No, I don't," he said, "I deny it completely. I deny it with all the vehemence at my command."

But I held up my hand.

"Just a moment," I said. "This is a matter, Ezekiel, upon which I must be absolutely clear. Do you mean to deny that the word does begin with a Y? Or do you mean to deny that you meant to tell me that you were prepared to deny that it did?"

"I deny it all," said Ezekiel. "I deny the whole thing."

"But, my dear Ezekiel," I said, "that is impossible."

"But how can it be impossible," he said, "if I've just done it?"

"Because the two alternatives," I replied, "are contradictory."

"Then I deny them both," he said. "I deny

them utterly. I deny them to the utmost limit of my capacity."

"But by denying one," I said, "you affirm the other, and by denying the other you affirm the first."

"Then I deny neither," he said. "I deny neither of them. I deny neither of them to my last breath."

"Then you affirm both?" I asked.

"Absolutely and entirely," he said, "to the remotest follicle of my manhood."

"But that leaves us," I said, "just as we were."

"Very likely," he replied. "I don't know."

"But I don't understand," I said.

"Nor do I," he said.

We stood staring at one another in silence.

"Then we'd better go back," I said, "to the original Yew-tree."

"What Yew-tree?" inquired Ezekiel.

"Why, the one you referred to," I said, "as not requiring an *an*."

"But I've already told you," he said, "that I deny that."

"But, my dear Ezekiel," I said, "you can't deny things like that."

"I not only can," he said, "but I do."

"But you'll soon be denying," I cried, "that

I'm the Vice-President of the Anti-Dramatic and Saltatory Union."

"I certainly shall," he said, "if you continue to go about referring to actresses by their Xtian names."

"But, my dear Ezekiel," I said, "it was entirely at her own request that I referred to Miss Moonbeam as Mary."

He stepped back a pace, obviously shaken.

"Do you mean to tell me," he said, "that she asked you to?"

"Most certainly," I replied, "and if you would like to hear them, I can repeat her actual words."

"Please do," he said.

"'Oh, Mr. Carp,'" I said, "'won't you call me Mary?'"

His face brightened a little.

"Then she didn't call you Augustus?" he said.

"She hasn't done so," I answered, "as yet."

"And perhaps she never will," he said, "never will."

"I don't quite see," I said, "why you should say that."

"Perhaps not," he replied. "But I do say it."

"Of course I shouldn't encourage her to," I said, "until she had altered her profession."

"And perhaps she won't," he said, "perhaps she won't."

"Won't what?" I asked.

"Alter her profession."

"But don't you want her to?" I cried.

"Oh, of course," he said. "But they seldom do, you know, unless they marry."

"Precisely," I said, "unless they marry."

He opened his mouth for a moment, but only breathed through it.

"But you don't mean to tell me," he said, "that as Vice-President——?"

"It might be my duty," I said, "to sacrifice myself."

"So much as that?" he said. "So much as that, Augustus?"

He covered his eyes for a moment with his gloved hands. Then he suddenly remembered that he had dropped his umbrella.

"It's here," I said, "under my foot."

"Oh, thank you," he said, "thank you."

Then he held out his hands to me with frank contrition.

"Oh, my dear friend," he said, "forgive me for misjudging you. But as your President, I could never permit it."

"But why not?" I said, trying to release my hands.

"Why, because as President," he cried, "it is clearly the sort of sacrifice that I ought to make myself."

"But I don't see why," I said, again trying to release myself.

"But don't you see," he cried, still holding my hands, "how symbolic it would then become—the marriage of one of the most prominent of our younger ex-actresses with the Anti-Dramatic and Saltatory Union?"

"But she wouldn't be marrying the Union," I said.

"Not if she married you," he said, "who are merely the Vice-President. But if she married me, Augustus, it would be different. It would become the sacrifice of the whole Union."

"But, my dear Ezekiel," I said, "ought you to sacrifice the whole Union without consulting all its members?"

"Oh, but I should," he said, "I certainly should, and any that objected I should ask to resign."

I reflected for a moment. Admirable as was his character, it was in many respects singularly bigoted, while his intelligence, sometimes so brilliant, was at others inferior even to that of his sisters. Since the burial of his parents, too, a couple of years previously, and the consequent

augmentation of his own income, I had been conscious in him of a rather unexpected and somewhat disturbing vein of arrogance. I therefore decided, for the present at any rate, that the wisest policy was one of postponement.

"But surely in that case," I said, "they should have an opportunity of seeing her."

"Oh, of course," he said, "of course."

"Before they married her, I mean—as an Union."

"Oh, certainly," he said, "certainly."

Then his hair parted for a moment, revealing his teeth.

"In fact, I was just going to suggest," he smiled, "asking her to one of our meetings."

"I'll certainly do so," I said. "I'll ask her to-morrow."

"We'll both ask her," he replied.

"But you won't be there," I said.

"Yes, I shall," he answered. "I shall come with you."

"But she hasn't invited you," I said, again trying to free my hands.

"But, my dear Augustus," he said, gripping them a little tighter, "surely you don't expect me to wait for that? Does the powerful swimmer refrain from plunging until the drowning victim has asked him to do so, or the hurrying police-

man refuse to cut the rope because the would-be suicide has not invited it? Does the fireman hesitate before the smouldering nightgown until the female inside it has shown him her card?"

"Perhaps not," I said, stepping a pace backwards.

"Certainly not," he said, following me.

"But on the other hand," I said, stepping sideways, "if a powerful swimmer has already plunged, if a hurrying policeman is already there, if a soaring fireman has already stooped——"

"Then that is all the more reason," he said, also stepping sideways, "why the hero should be helped as I mean to help you."

"Well, I can't promise," I said, "that she will be willing to receive you."

"Not when she knows," he asked, "that I'm the Adult Gripe Water?"

"Well, she might," I said. "I'll do my best, of course."

"Dear Augustus," he replied, "I thought you would."

Then he dropped my hands, now seriously congested, and stooping down, picked up his umbrella.

"And I don't want you to feel," he added, "now that I propose to take charge of the work, that your share in it has been unappreciated."

Then we climbed into the omnibus that was to take us to Camberwell and sat side by side in it in silence, parting as usual, however, with a mutual benediction, though I could not conceal from myself that his attitude had disappointed me. For though it would have been inevitable, and indeed desirable, that subsequent to redemption Miss Moonbeam should have met him, this was scarcely the moment, I felt, for the sudden intrusion of a second deliverer. Nor were the nuptials that he had proposed for her other than profoundly distasteful to me, though a glance at my mirror sufficed to reassure me of their extreme unlikelihood. Nevertheless, I deemed it wise before retiring to bed to send a brief note to Miss Moonbeam, regretting the pertinacity that would probably result in my being accompanied by Ezekiel, but at the same time indicating that he was not to be dismissed as a wholly valueless acquaintance. "Nor must you forget," I concluded, "that he is at least the President of the great Union that has brought us together." A difficult letter, it had needed all the tact that I had been able to summon to its composition, and the clock had struck eleven, I remember, before I was able to open my nightgown bag, preparatory to taking out my nightgown.

I was a little pale, therefore, when I arrived at

the theatre at six o'clock the next evening, and though fully confident of my ability to control the situation, I was naturally somewhat anxious as to the effect upon Miss Moonbeam of a night's consideration. Had the latent thirst for a higher life, that my person had aroused in her the night before, been submerged again by wicked companions or quickened by my absence? Had she gone to sleep dreaming of the footlights or of an Anti-Dramatic and Saltatory future? And how had the poor child, reared in sin and ignorance, received the letter that I had been obliged to write to her?

Such were the questions that occupied my mind as Ezekiel came hurrying to meet me, and we walked upstairs to the same room in which I had talked with her the night before. For the first moment, too, I was a trifle dazzled both by the brilliance of its illumination and the clamour of conversation that greeted our entrance from the large number of persons whom we found assembled in it. This died down instantly, however, when our names were announced, and as we stood framed for a moment in the doorway, nothing could have been more striking than the effect of our presence upon the actors and actresses huddled before us. I say huddled because, as so often happens when evil-doers are

taken by surprise, they had unanimously winced and drawn closer together, while at least two of them had murmured "Help!" Moreover, it was quite clear that some of them had been drinking, since their wine glasses were still in their hands, and indeed I was almost certain, to my deep consternation, that Miss Moonbeam herself had been one of these.* Her hands were empty, however, when she came forward to greet us, and although Ezekiel had abruptly stiffened, I could not see my way to refuse the manual courtesy, to which she was evidently looking forward.

"Oh, Mr. Carp," she said, "this is indeed sweet of you. I was beginning to be afraid that you weren't coming."

"My dear Miss Moonbeam," I began.

"Mary," she said.

"My dear Mary," I said, "I never break my word."

"No, no, you wouldn't," she said, "and my friends will be so pleased. Let me introduce you to them. This is Mr. Augustus Carp."

I bowed to them gravely.

"And you've brought your friend?" she said.

"The President of our Union," I said, "Mr. Ezekiel Stool."

*I am now, alas, convinced of this.

She held out her hand to him.

"I'm sure we shall be great friends," she said. But he was still staring suspiciously at her colleagues.

"They've been drinking," he said. "What have they been drinking?"

"Oh, nothing much," she said. "Only my health."

"Your health?" he repeated.

"Yes, it's my birthday," she said.

"My dear Miss Mary," I said. "Let me congratulate you."

"Yes, yes, yes," said Ezekiel. "But what's the fluid?"

He tilted his face a little, sniffing the air.

"Oh, I see," said Miss Moonbeam. "How stupid of me. Reggie, come forward and show them your glass."

She glanced over her shoulder, and a young man, whom I instantly recognized as the naval officer, then approached us carrying a wine glass filled with a dark, translucent liquid.

"It's delightful stuff," he said. "It is really. Won't you taste a little before you begin your sermon?"

But Ezekiel started back, gripping my left elbow, while the hair covering his face extended itself protectively.

"No, no," he cried. "Augustus, keep close to me. I don't like the smell of it. Ask him what it's made of."

I drew myself up a little, facing the naval officer, while Ezekiel clung to my elbow.

"You must pardon us," I said, "but in addition to our connection with the Anti-Dramatic and Saltatory Union, we are also officials—and in this particular work, I hold a higher position than my comrade—we are also officials of the Society for the Prevention of the Strong Drink Traffic. It is therefore not only important to us, since we have been invited to rescue you, to learn whether this also is one of your vices, but doubly necessary that we ourselves should take every possible precaution. You will consequently perceive, I hope, the imperative necessity of our assuring ourselves, before we partake of it, that the composition of the liquor you have proffered us is such as our consciences can approve of."

"Oh, I'm sure of it," he said. "Just smell it."

"Personally," I replied, "I do not object to the smell."

"And the taste," he added, "is even pleasanter."

"I can quite believe it," I said. "But what is it made of?"

"Oh, just fruit," said Miss Moonbeam. "It's

a sort of fruit squash, you know—a fruit squash, made of fruit.”

Ezekiel advanced a little and put his face against it.

“I prefer the colour,” he said, “to the smell.”

“Yes, isn’t it beautiful?” said the naval officer, and several of the other actors said the same thing.

“But what’s it called?” said Ezekiel.

“Portugalade,” said Miss Moonbeam.

“That’s because it comes from Portugal,” said the naval officer.

“And one gets used to the smell,” said Ezekiel. “But why does one drink it out of wine glasses?”

“Oh, but one needn’t,” said Miss Moonbeam.

“One can drink it out of tumblers.”

“One just used wine glasses,” said the naval officer, “because one happened to find them in the cupboard.”

I looked at him piercingly.

“But surely that seems to indicate,” I said, “that they have been used for other and less innocent beverages.”

He hung his head, and as my glance swept his companions, I observed that most of them hung theirs also.

Then he lifted it again, not without a certain honesty.

"Mr. Carp," he said, "it's no use deceiving you. And I'm afraid I must confess that I haven't confined myself to such health-giving drinks as this Portugalade."

"Nor we," said his companions. "Nor we."

"But we hope to do better," said Miss Moonbeam, "in the future."

"Then, ladies and gentlemen," I said, sipping the Portugalade, which seemed to me exceptionally agreeable, "I can only implore you—and I speak not only for myself, but for my friend Mr. Stool——"

"Of the Adult Gripe Water," said Ezekiel. "It was invented by my late father."

"You don't say so?" said the naval officer.

"Was that what made him late?" asked Miss Moonbeam.

Ezekiel stared at her over the glass of Portugalade, which I had handed on to him before beginning my speech.

"How do you mean late?" he said.

"Wasn't that what you said?" asked Miss Moonbeam.

"Yes, but I meant dead," said Ezekiel. "He's been dead some time."

"You don't mean it?" said the naval officer.

"Yes. It's rather nice," said Ezekiel.

"I see," said Miss Moonbeam. "You didn't get on together?"

"I meant the Portugalade," said Ezekiel.

"—I can only implore you," I continued, "while there's still time—before the craving for stimulants has finally overcome you—to cast them away from you with both hands, to crush them under foot, to leave them for ever."

I glanced at Ezekiel, who was wiping his mouth.

"And, ladies and gentlemen," I said, "why should you hesitate? Have you not here—or had you not there, rather—in the very glass that my friend has just emptied, a drink as genial, as palatable and invigorating as the most debauched of you could desire?"

"We have, we have," they cried.

"Then, ladies and gentlemen," I said, "before we further address you on the evils of the drama, may I not beg of you to make up your minds to drink nothing less healthful than this in the future?"

"You may, you may," they said.

I turned to Ezekiel.

"Then I'll ask Mr. Stool," I said, "to inaugurate our second appeal."

I then stood aside while Ezekiel cleared his

throat preparatory to delivering his usual oration, and it was during the course of this that Miss Moonbeam drew me aside and informed me how much she had appreciated my letter.

"I thought it was so dear of you," she said, "to let your friend down without seeming to want to do anything of the kind."

"It was certainly difficult," I said.

"But you managed it so beautifully," she said. "How long do you suppose he will go on speaking?"

"Twenty minutes," I said. "This is his half-hour harangue."

She was looking a little pale, I thought. But she smiled bravely.

"Well, I suppose we deserve it," she said.

"Oh, undoubtedly," I replied, "and he wants you to attend one of our meetings."

"What—all of us?" she asked.

"You would all be welcome," I said.

"And would you be there too?" she asked, pressing my hand.

"Why, of course," I said, permitting her to continue pressing, "I am the Vice-President."

"Yes, I know," she whispered.

Here Ezekiel paused for a moment and glanced at us keenly. But Miss Moonbeam at once smiled at him and clapped her hands.

"You don't think he's jealous?" she said, as he continued.

"Jealous of what?" I asked.

"Why, of you and me," she said.

She was pressing my hand again and endeavouring to draw closer to me.

"Well, I'm rather afraid," I said, "that he may be."

"You see," said Miss Moonbeam, "if I'm to be rescued by anybody, I should so like it to be by you."

"Dear Mary," I said, "and so it shall, at whatever cost, at whatever sacrifice."

"Dear Augustus," she said. "May I call you Augustus? It sounds so ungrateful to say Mr. Carp."

"Yes, yes," I said. "I can quite understand it. But I would rather you suppressed the familiarity in public."

Then Ezekiel concluded, and after some words from myself, a special meeting of the Union was arranged, at which all our listeners, including Miss Moonbeam, solemnly engaged themselves to be present. It was to take place, we agreed, on the following Sunday week, at the Porter Street Drill Hall in Camberwell, and at Miss Moonbeam's suggestion, Mr. Chrysostom Lorton was to be invited to say a few words.

"I didn't know you knew him," I said.

"Nor I do," she replied. "But as he's the publisher of all these beautiful booklets, I thought it would be so nice if he would just stoop for a moment to mingle with the sinners for whom they are intended."

"A splendid idea," I said, "and a most intelligent one, and we'll circularize the churches and chapels, and hold the meeting at nine in the evening, when the congregations will be able to be present."

"Oh, that'll be capital," she said. "I should love to see a congregation."

"And Ezekiel and myself," I said, "will be the chief speakers."

She clapped her hands and looked at Ezekiel.

"Oh, Mr. Stool," she cried, "what a meeting."

Ezekiel beamed at her.

"Yes, it ought to be worth going to," he said, "and I shall reserve a chair for you next the President."

Then she drew me aside again.

"And you must have supper with me first," she said, "just you and me and a few of my friends."

"My dear Mary," I said, "nothing would delight me more."

"I feel a whole new world," she said, "opening before me."

Upon the following Sunday week, therefore, at half-past seven, I stood outside her house in Bedford Square, and the next moment I was being led upstairs by a modestly dressed parlour-maid in a white cap. Clad myself in a well-fitting morning coat with a hand-knitted waistcoat and a velveteen tie, I found Miss Moonbeam with her men and women companions eagerly awaiting me in evening dress. About a dozen in all, they included the naval officer and two young men, whom she introduced as her brothers, while there were several females who greeted me with deference, but whose chests, as I pointed out to them, were inadequately covered. They begged my pardon, however, with the not unreasonable excuse that the standards I had set them were not easily reached, and at my urgent request, Miss Moonbeam provided them with napkins to make good the deficiency. This having been attended to, we then went downstairs to a capacious dining-room on the ground floor, where an excellent meal was ushered in with some admirably prepared chicken soup.

Followed by fish, partridges and salad, bowls of stewed fruit and Devonshire cream, it was concluded with a savoury consisting of stuffed eggs mounted on triangular pieces of toast, and I was gratified to observe, that apart from water,

the only other beverage was Portugalade. It was again, to my annoyance, however, served in wine glasses, although Miss Moonbeam immediately apologized, pouring out a tumblerful for me with her own hand, just as I was beginning my second partridge. Nor did I find it any less agreeable than upon my first acquaintance with it at the theatre, and indeed I had seldom experienced such a sense of warmth and comfort as it very quickly began to endow me with. Peculiarly attractive to the nostril, it was no less grateful to the tongue, while upon its downward passage, it lent an extraordinary balm to a naturally irritable digestive system.

Nay, it did more, for as it enriched the blood mounting to an always responsive brain, I found myself the vehicle of a delightful flow of new and most valuable ideas. I say valuable, and this was indeed the case, but many of them were also outstandingly humorous, and time after time I was obliged to call for silence so that none of those present might fail to hear them. I was glad to perceive, too, that they met with an instant response both in laughter and rapt attention, and I was soon convinced that, beneath the trappings of guilt, there was a spark of goodness in most of my listeners. Nor had Miss Moonbeam, who kept my tumbler filled, ever appeared to me to

be so well worth saving, and when I accidentally upset my fruit, she was solicitude's self as she wiped my waistcoat.

By a second mischance, too, I spilt my coffee, which was served at the supper-table just before we rose; and on this occasion also she was instantly at hand to remove the stains from the upper part of my trousers. Then we rose for grace, which I proposed should be sung, and into the singing of which I threw my whole being; and when I found myself swaying a little, owing to the consequent fatigue, both she and the naval officer kindly supported me. Indeed so acute was the resulting vertigo that I was not only obliged for a moment to sit down, but I found myself only too glad to rely on their aid as we descended the front steps to the waiting vehicles. Glad as I was, however, they both assured me that they were gladder even than I was, while the others assured us, as we glanced across the pavement, that they were gladder even than we were. In fact, we were all glad, and although I had been a little perturbed by the physical disability to which I have referred, I was soon restored by the night air, the motion of the vehicle, and the prospects of the meeting. Moreover, the naval officer had brought with him a large bottle of the Portugalade, and a further draught of this at

once completed, and indeed augmented, my sense of well-being.

"Yes, it ought to be grand," I said, "a grand meeting, the grandest meeting we've ever had," and I remember putting my head out of the right-hand window and inviting the passers-by to come and join us.

"Yes, there's no doubt of it," I said, "it'll be a grand meeting, a grand, grand meeting, grander and grander."

"As grand as grand," said the naval officer.

"Yes, and grander than that," I said, "ever so grand."

Then I started a hymn just to clear my chest again, and finding, to my satisfaction, that it was surprisingly supple, I led my companions through chorus after chorus of a brisk but devotional character. Indeed we were in the middle of one when we arrived at the Drill Hall, and so intent had I become on the music that I unfortunately tripped as I alighted upon the pavement and struck my abdomen rather violently. Two of Miss Moonbeam's brothers, however, who were waiting to receive us, at once readjusted me upon my legs, while the naval officer came to their assistance in conducting me to my chair upon the platform.

Nor had I been in error in foreseeing an

audience that filled the hall to its utmost capacity, Miss Moonbeam herself and several of her companions being audibly recognized on their way to their seats. Many of our members, too, in different parts of the hall, were standing on their feet, I noticed, to give me a personal welcome; and no sooner had I hailed these in affectionate terms than others took their places to be hailed in turn. So prolonged, in fact, did these greetings become, and to such a pitch of heartiness did they climb, that Ezekiel's own arrival upon the platform, accompanied by Mr. Chrysostom Lorton, was scarcely noticed.

That was probably the reason, I inferred, why his expression was almost less pleasant than I had ever known it, and why he obviously resented the attentions of Miss Moonbeam's brothers, who were still standing, one on each side of me. Mr. Chrysostom, too, seemed curiously distant, I thought, as I swung round and clasped his hand, although I assured him, in tones that rang through the hall, of my intense delight at his presence.

"Simply overwhelmed," I said, "simply overwhelmed, Mr. Chrysostom. Let me introduce you to Miss Moonbeam. Miss Moonbeam, Mr. Chrysostom Lorton. Mr. Chrysostom Lorton, Miss Moonbeam."

Then I turned to the audience with a great shout.

"Three cheers," I cried, "for Mr. Chrysostom Lorton. Hip—hip——"

But Ezekiel held up his hand.

"I propose to open this meeting," he said, "with prayer."

For a moment I was staggered. Indeed I almost fell down. It was the directest insult I had ever received. And it was not only an insult to myself, but to Mr. Chrysostom, who was deprived of his cheers.

"Oh, how dare you?" I cried. "How dare you, Ezekiel? Oh, Mr. Chrysostom, how dare he? Hip, hip, I say—Hip, hip," but the audience remained silent and evidently confused. In fact, the effect upon them of Ezekiel's proposal must have been exasperating in the extreme, since they had all opened their mouths and protruded their upper lips preparatory to cheering, as I had suggested. They had then been obliged, just as they had taken their breaths, to retract their upper lips again and close their mouths, and were naturally reluctant, in spite of my further exhortation, to resume a process once frustrated. Nevertheless, many of them did so, although they failed in its final consummation, with the lamentable result that they resembled nothing so

much as goldfish breathing in a bowl.

"Goldfish," I cried. "That's what they are. Poor lost goldfish, without a shepherd. Oh, Ezekiel, Ezekiel Stool! How could you do such a thing as that?"

With incredible determination, however, he was already on his knees and in the second paragraph of his supplication; and it was only after I had shaken him several times that he sprang to his feet with a sort of yelp.

"Oh, Ezekiel," I said, "what a horrible noise."

"Leave me alone," he snarled. "Can't you see I'm busy?"

"Horrible noise," I said, "horrible, horrible. Isn't it a horrible noise, Mr. Chrysostom?"

Then I turned to the audience again.

"Let's say it all together," I said. "One, two, three, horrible noise. That's better. Now let's say it again. One, two——"

Then I stopped abruptly, for as I advanced to the brink of the platform, with Miss Moonbeam's brothers at my elbows, I suddenly became aware of a solitary grey eye regarding me objectionably from the front row. Its fellow was of glass, and the face that contained them, with its high cheekbones and gaunt cheeks, was that of none other than Mr. Archibald Maidstone, the show-room manager whom I had succeeded.

For a moment I could scarcely believe it. But hardly had I recovered myself than I found myself in his arms, with Miss Moonbeam's brothers left upon the platform, each holding a moiety of the tail of my coat.

"Well, laddie," he said, "it's your turn now."

I endeavoured to push myself away from him.

"Take him away," I shouted. "Take that man away. Where's Mr. Chrysostom? Where's Miss Moonbeam?"

The tumult in the hall was now indescribable. Glasses of water were on every side of me. But I thrust them all aside and shouted to the naval officer to bring me the bottle that he had placed upon the table.

"The bottle," I cried. "Bring me the bottle. Never mind the glass. Give me the bottle."

But the naval officer, evidently at his request, had handed the bottle to Mr. Chrysostom. I saw him examine it through his spectacles in his usual pompous and deliberate fashion and then, with a heightened colour and protuberant eyes, exhibit it to Ezekiel and the members of the committee.

"Disgraceful," he said, "perfectly disgraceful. The fellow's drunk, I say. Just look at that. Vintage Port, and he's been drinking it out of a

tumbler. Perfectly disgraceful. Show me the way out."

I rose to my feet and caught sight of Miss Moonbeam's brothers.

"Give me that bottle," I cried. "Give me the tails of my coat. Who says I'm drunk? Where's the Portugalade? Take that man away. Where's Miss Moonbeam?"

"But he's my father," she said.

I tried to stare at her. But her face kept advancing and retreating.

"Stand still, woman," I cried. "But his name's Maidstone."

"So's mine," she said, "when I'm not acting."

I snatched at her wrist, but it proved to be my own.

"Do you mean to say," I asked, "that you're Mary Maidstone?"

"Polly Maidstone," she said. "Don't you remember? The same Polly that made a face at you."

I sank to the floor for a moment, but rose on my hands again.

"Throw her out," I yelled. "Throw that woman out."

She looked at Ezekiel.

"Hadn't we better take him home?" she asked.

"But I haven't made my speech," I said, "speech to the meeting."

Ezekiel stared at me with incredible bitterness.

"There isn't a meeting left," he said, "to make a speech to."

I pointed at the clocks. They were all at half-past nine.

"But we've hardly begun," I said. "Where's the platform?"

Mr. Maidstone bent over me——*

* See conclusion of Chapter VIII.

CHAPTER XVII

Profound depression subsequent to port-poisoning. An iniquitous plot and its consequences. Insubordination of Miss Botterill. I retire from the firm of Mr. Chrysostom Lorton. A crushing rejoinder and its repetition. Second journey to Enfield. Transformation of Mrs. Chrysostom's boudoir. Unexpected repentance of Mrs. Chrysostom. Unfortunate results of this for myself. Fruitless termination of interview.

SUCH was the cross that had suddenly been imposed upon me—a cross so gigantic and of such a character that only the most prolonged and assiduous training could have enabled me to bear it. Indeed, for some little time it seemed only too likely that it would prove too crushing even for me; and had not Nature intervened with a period of merciful unconsciousness, this would almost certainly have been the case. Fortunately I arrived home, however, as my father has assured me, in a deep though stertorous slumber, and did not awake until nearly eleven o'clock on the following Monday morning. There was thus accorded me an opportunity for the recuperation of those vital reserves that would even then, as I slowly began to realize, be desperately hard put to it to give me adequate support.

I say slowly because, when I first woke, my physical nausea was so great that I was totally

unable to form a clear judgment upon the events of the previous evening. Nor was my mother, never a fluent speaker, more communicative than usual. I had been brought home, she said, by two young gentlemen, whose names she did not know, and a doctor had been called in, at my father's request, who had made a diagnosis with which my father disagreed. Indeed my father, I gathered, had been considerably upset, and had spent a restless night in consequence, and my mother had been obliged on three separate occasions, to prepare him a cup of malted milk. She then awaited my orders for breakfast. But this was a meal that I was compelled to omit. And it was only after she had left me that my memory began to recover itself and to lay its sombre offerings at the feet of my judgment. Then I rang the bell again and inquired of my mother the exact terms of the doctor's diagnosis. But she shook her head and referred me to my father, who would be able to tell me, she said, when he returned from business.

"Not that it much matters," she added, "for you'd be sure to disagree with it."

"I certainly should," I replied, "and I certainly shall. I was poisoned—deliberately poisoned—by the wicked woman with whom I had my supper."

"An actress, I believe," said my mother.

"Whom I was prepared to save," I said, "from a deserved perdition."

My mother was silent for a moment.

"Is that all?" she said.

"How do you mean, all?" I asked.

"I mean, may I go now?"

"Oh, yes, yes," I said. "Shut the door quietly, please; and I should like my shaving water in about an hour."

Then I lay back quietly, closing my eyes in pain and rehearsing such speeches as would be necessary to put both Mr. Chrysostom Lorton and Ezekiel Stool in the full possession of the facts of the case. It would also be essential, I foresaw, to call a further special meeting of the Anti-Dramatic and Saltatory Union and to make a point of addressing, at the earliest opportunity, the Society for the Prevention of the Strong Drink Traffic. It would be equally important, too, in my capacity of gap-filler, to prepare an explanatory petition for use at the local prayer-meetings, the majority of which had contributed members to last night's audience in the Porter Street Drill Hall. Yes, it was all coming back to me in its devilish ingenuity (for it had evidently been a plot on the part of Mr. Maidstone's daughter), and she might depend upon it that if

legal redress were possible, it should be extracted from her to the last farthing.

But was it possible? The more I considered it, the more doubtful I became. And even were it possible, would it be expedient? The condition of my head forbade an immediate answer. Indeed I was now the subject of a thirst so overwhelming that without pausing to summon my mother, I was obliged to quench it from the various receptacles within easy reach upon my wash-hand stand. I was profoundly shocked, too, by the aspect of my countenance, as this was disclosed to me by my looking-glass; and accustomed as I was to a frequently concealed tongue, I had never before seen it so deeply obscured. Even after I had shaved and dressed, indeed, I was a little doubtful as to whether I should be able to complete the journey to town. But I was determined if possible not only to make the attempt, but to perform my usual afternoon duties. After a cup of tea therefore, and a fragment of dried herring, I ventured into the street and mounted an omnibus, arriving in Paternoster Row at about two o'clock to find Miss Botterill in charge of the show-room.

"Good afternoon," I said. "I have been the victim of a dastardly plot, or I should have been in my place this morning as usual."

"Good afternoon," she replied, "and please, Mr. Chrysostom said, would you go up to his room as soon as you arrived."

"Certainly," I said, "and when I come down, Miss Botterill, I should like to see that counter looking a little tidier."

Miss Botterill hesitated.

"I'm just rearranging it," she said. "I propose in future to have it less crowded."

I stared at her.

"You propose what?" I asked.

"I propose in future," she said, "to have a bowl of flowers upon it and merely a very few of our latest books."

Depleted as I felt, I yet retained command of myself.

"But, my dear Miss Botterill," I said, "permit me to remind you that your duty is to obey and not propose. You will therefore kindly restore the counter to its previous appearance and remember in future that you are not show-room manager."

"But I am," she said.

She continued her rearranging.

Deprived of breath, I could only stand and watch her.

Then I leapt forward and gripped her shoulder.

"Oh, how dare you?" I cried. "How dare you, woman?"

She began to scream. But I declined to let her go until several of the clerks had emerged from the correspondence room. Then I flung her from me heavily, turned upon my heel, and instantly proceeded to Mr. Chrysostom's office. He was standing at the door.

"What's all this screaming?" he said.

"I regret to say," I replied, "that Miss Botterill has been insubordinate."

"Insubordinate?" he said. "And to whom, please?"

"To myself," I replied, "as your representative."

"Then kindly understand," he said, "kindly understand, sir, that after last night——"

I waved my hand.

"One moment," I said. "It is to explain about last night that I have managed to force myself to come and see you."

He distended his cheeks.

"Then you could have spared yourself the trouble," he said. "I don't want to see your face again."

"But, my dear sir," I said.

"I'm not your dear sir," he shouted. "I'm not your dear anything. I've no further use for you."

But I held up my hand again.

"I must beg you to control yourself," I said,

"until this unfortunate mishap has been fully explained to you."

"Mishap?" he said. "Do you call it a mishap, sir, to invite your employer to a religious gathering and leave him to be received by a thing like a stunted gorilla, because you're too drunk to stand by yourself?"

"But, my dear sir," I began.

"Don't say that again," he said. "Don't say anything again. I don't want to hear it. You were drunk, sir. You were damnably drunk. You were so drunk that you fell off the platform."

Involuntarily I winced, as who would not have done? But once more I held up my hand.

"Mr. Lorton," I said, "you have forgotten who I am, or such words could never have escaped you. And I was neither drunk, nor would have such a thing have been possible. I was merely suffering from deliberate port-poisoning."

If anything, however, he became more violent.

"Port-poisoning?" he bawled. "What's port-poisoning? Port isn't poison, sir. I drink it myself. In fact, I was obliged, sir, to drink some of your own—an excellent port, sir, that probably saved my life."

"I regret to hear it," I said. "But allow me to point out to you that the fluid you mention was not my own, and that I had been in-

formed by its donors that it was a species of fruit squash, imported from Portugal and known as Portugalade."

"But, good God, sir, there's no such thing."

"Precisely," I replied. "That's my point."

"Your point?" he cried. "What do you mean by your point?"

"Why, that I was refreshed," I said, "and subsequently disabled by a beverage that has no existence."

"Then you're a fool," he said. "You're either a knave, sir—a drunken knave—or a fool."

"Then am I to understand," I said, "that I am no longer show-room manager?"

"You're no longer anything," he said, "in any business of mine."

I leaned against the wall.

"And you call yourself a Xtian gentleman?" I said.

"I certainly do," he said, "and I thank God for it."

Then I stood erect again, dashing the tears from my eyes. He pulled out his handkerchief.

"Don't wet me," he said.

"It was inadvertent," I said.

"I'm glad to hear it," he replied.

"And I apologize," I said, "to the moisture." For a moment he gaped at me, and little

wonder. It was perhaps the crushingest remark in human history.

"I apologize," I said, "to the moisture."

Yes, it must have cut him to the quick.

It was so crushing, indeed, that I repeated it to Miss Botterill.

"Miss Botterill," I said, "I am leaving."

"Yes, I know," she said. "I knew before you came."

"May I beg," I replied, "that you won't interrupt me."

She was silent, and I continued.

"And one of my tears," I said, "fell on Mr. Chrysostom."

"Oh dear," she said. "Poor Mr. Chrysostom."

"So I apologized," I said.

"Quite right," she said.

"But not to Mr. Chrysostom," I said. "I apologized to the moisture."

"To the moisture?" she said. "What moisture?"

"Why, to the moisture," I explained, "of the tear."

She stared at me with her mouth open.

"But what was the good of that?" she asked.

"The moisture couldn't hear you."

"No. It couldn't hear me," I said, "it couldn't hear me, Miss Botterill. But don't

you see that by apologizing to the moisture, I was conveying to Mr. Chrysostom, in the most trenchant way possible, my own opinion of his character."

"No, I don't," said Miss Botterill. "I don't see it at all."

"Then I'll explain it," I said, "over again."

Just at that moment, however, a customer entered the show-room, and although I waited for several minutes, another customer entered the show-room just as the first was departing. I therefore decided to leave the premises, spurning them, as I did so, with my right foot, and it was not until I had already turned into Ludgate Hill that I suddenly remembered my unused weapon. Mrs. Chrysostom Lorton—I had utterly forgotten her. Indeed I had never seen her since my first interview. But she had always been there, of course—there in the background—ready to be used in an emergency like this. I stopped short. Yes, I had forgotten her. But to have remembered her was to act at once. For there could be no doubt about it. It would be wholly impossible for her to afford to sit still and have me dismissed. I therefore advanced to the kerbstone and hailed an omnibus, and within half an hour of conceiving the idea was in a third-class carriage leaving Liverpool Street Station upon

my second visit to Enfield. Depressed as I was, too, both physically and mentally, in spite of my crushing rejoinder to Mr. Chrysostom, my spirits perceptibly rose as I neared my destination, stimulated by the memory of my previous triumph. For though a good many years had now elapsed since I last stood in that lascivious boudoir, Time had not dimmed the spiritual victory that it had been my privilege to gain there.

It was with an eye, therefore, comparatively clear that I once more approached Paternoster Towers and with a hand almost steady that I again knocked at its front door. Nor was the strange parlourmaid that received my card and presently conducted me to Mrs. Chrysostom's room appreciably less respectful in her demeanour than the gentle domestic that had first received me. But the room itself, apart from its floor, which was now almost lecherous in its degree of polish, was so transformed that for several moments I could scarcely believe myself in the same apartment. Gone was the French-looking writing-table with its reflected legs. Gone was the nude huntress with the splinter in her calf. Gone was the oval mirror with its indelicate Cupids. Gone even was the photograph signed Your aff. Chrysostom. Nay, gone was the very couch with its sensuous cushions, and in its

place stood a low divan, padded it was true, and not uncomfortably, but cushioned and draped with the sombrest purple.

There hung upon the walls, too, what were apparently lists of commandments, engraved upon parchment in foreign characters, while in each angle of the room stood a sort of shrine containing an alabaster image and an electric candle. Moreover, although it was still daylight, the curtains were drawn; a casket of incense swung from the ceiling; and between the lists of commandments, hung various religious implements, phylacteries, wands, and sacrificial knives.

Profound, and indeed disturbing, however, as were the changes in the room, those in Mrs. Chrysostom were even more remarkable, although in actual appearance she had altered very little since I had last been obliged to interview her. It was just conceivable, in fact, that for less disciplined eyes she might still have retained a certain attraction, not unenhanced by the severity of her gown and the sober arrangement of her hair. Parted at the side, this now fell over her brow in a single yellowish-coloured wave, while her dark dress—it was still clinging, I noticed—was unadorned in every respect. Her whole mien, too, was entirely different, and as she drooped, as it were, into the room, she extended

her hand to me with a sort of grave surprise, as if I had been some stranger whom she had never seen.

"How do you do?" she said, sinking upon the divan. "This is my little temple. Won't you sit down?"

I glanced about me.

"I can't offer you a chair," she said. "But you'll find my prayer-mat just behind you."

Just as I put my heel upon it, however, it began to slip, and leaning over, she put her finger upon it.

"Let me hold it," she said, "while you lower yourself. I once had a visitor who lost two of his trouser-buttons."

"It was myself," I said.

She looked at me steadfastly.

"But surely," she said, "I haven't seen you before?"

I bowed to her gravely.

"You certainly have," I said.

She lifted her eyebrows a little.

"But can that be possible?" she asked.

"It is not only possible," I said, "but it actually happened."

Her tapering fore-finger touched my knee.

"Then forgive me," she said, "but, if I may venture to say so, hasn't Time been exceedingly kind to you?"

I stared at her.

"I don't quite follow," I said.

"No, of course not," she said, "your modesty would forbid it. But I can scarcely conceive that, if such had not been the case, I should have failed to remember you."

"Of course I have matured," I said.

She nodded imperceptibly.

"That is what I meant," she said. "I think you must have."

"But it is rather about the future," I said, "than the past that I have been obliged to call upon you this afternoon."

Her eyes became dreamy, although they were still fixed upon me.

"Ah, the future," she said, "the unknown future."

"And you will be sorry to hear," I said, "that owing to a misunderstanding, Mr. Chrysostom has requested me to leave."

"Do you mean my husband?" she asked.

"Why, of course," I replied.

"Dear Chrysostom," she said. "This is some of his hair."

She showed me a small locket containing the article mentioned.

"I am compelled to remind you," I said, "that you were not always so affectionate."

"No, that's true," she said, "that's very true. But happily I also have matured."

I stared at her again, a trifle uneasily.

"Then perhaps you have forgotten," I said, "your friend Septimus?"

"Completely," she said. "Was there one?"

Had the floor been less slippery, I should have risen to my feet.

"Mr. Septimus Lorton," I said, "your husband's brother."

"You mean the one," she said, "that's just passed on?"

"Passed on?" I replied. "Where to?"

She waved her hands towards several of the shrines.

"Ah, if we but knew," she said, "if we but knew, Mr. Carp."

"But do you mean to tell me," I cried, "that he's defunct?"

"Run over," she said, "last week."

For a moment, I must confess, I was a little taken aback.

"But that doesn't alter the fact," I said, "that he was your lover."

"Very likely not," she said. "I don't remember. But I daresay you're right. There have been so many."

"But do you mean to say," I asked, "that

there has been more than one?"

"Oh far, far more than one," she said.

I began to rise again, and she put her finger on the mat.

"Let me hold it," she said, "while you get up."

This she did, and after a certain amount of difficulty, I once more towered above her.

"But your husband?" I said. "Does your husband know?"

"Everything," she said. "In fact, all."

I took a deep breath, followed by another.

"But what did he say?" I asked at last.

She closed her eyes for a moment.

"I'm afraid I oughtn't to tell you," she said.

"You see, since then I've embraced religion."

"Religion?" I said. "What religion?"

"Every religion," she said. "I've embraced them all."

"But how could you do that?" I asked.

"Oh, there was no difficulty," she said. "It has always been natural to me to embrace."

I glanced round the room.

"But certain religions," I said, "involve the slaughter of human beings."

"Yes, I know," she said. "I've included them. That's why those knives are hanging on the wall."

"But surely you don't practise them?" I said.

"No, they're cancelled out," she said, "by the religions that forbid the taking of life."

"But it seems to me," I said, "that, at that rate, all your religions cancel each other out."

"Yes," she replied. "That's what it often seems to me."

"But then you haven't a religion at all?"

"Well, I sometimes doubt it," she said. "I often wonder if I did the right thing in embracing them?"

It was not to discuss her religion, however, that I had journeyed to Enfield, as I was now somewhat tartly obliged to remind her.

"And you seem to be forgetting," I added, "that I've just been dismissed from the employment you were compelled to find me."

"Yes, I know," she said. "But why should I remember it?"

"Because you might prefer," I said, "to get the decision altered."

She lifted her eyes to me.

"Prefer it to what?" she inquired.

"Why, to permitting your husband," I said, "to hear from my lips the story of your relations with his brother Septimus."

"Oh, but I don't mind that," she said, "now that I've repented. And besides, as I told you, I'd forgotten all about it."

With growing uneasiness, I took another deep breath.

"But surely you're not prepared," I said, "to let me tell him?"

"On the contrary," she said, "I should welcome it, though I doubt if it would interest him after all the others."

I began to sway a little.

"But, my dear Mrs. Chrysostom," I said, "if you behave like that, I shall remain dismissed."

"But surely, Mr. Carp," she answered, "and I can see you're a good man, it's the only behaviour consistent with repentance."

I pulled out my handkerchief and wiped my forehead.

"Then you wouldn't speak a word," I asked, "on my behalf?"

She shook her head gently.

"It is one of my rules," she said, "never to interfere with dear Chrysostom's business."

I glanced round the room again. My hat was on one of the shrines.

"And you haven't yet told me," she said, "that you're glad I've repented."

"Oh, I am," I said. "I am glad."

"Then I mustn't detain you," she said. "Mind the polish."

CHAPTER XVIII

Physical reaction following my interview with Mrs. Chrysostom. Reception of a wreath from the Maidstones. Moving excerpt from Simeon's diary. I decide to marry one of Ezekiel's sisters. Interview with Ezekiel and his deplorable language. Tact is selected to become my bride. Tragic return to Mon Repos. I fall unconscious, parallel to my father.

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GLAD as I was, however, and indeed, as a Xtian gentleman, glad as I was compelled to be that Mrs. Chrysostom had repented, it was nevertheless a penitence that in respect of myself was little short of disastrous. And even now it is with the utmost difficulty that I can look back upon the weeks that followed. Deprived of my living; already nearing thirty; and the subject, as I soon found, of the grossest misjudgment—such was my prostration that for nearly three weeks, I was confined to my bedroom, if not to my bed. For two or three days, in fact, I doubted if I could recover, a doubt that was shared by my dear father; while a small wreath, sent by the Maidstones, was actually delivered at the house. Whether this was despatched under a misapprehension; whether it was the symbol of a genuine contrition; or whether it was merely a sop to an uneasy conscience, will probably

never be determined. And I refrained from acknowledging it until I had come to a decision as to the possibilities of legal action. After a prolonged interview, however, with Mr. Balfour Whey, and in view of my poor father's unhappy experiences, it was regretfully decided that the British judiciary was too uncertain to be relied upon; and in a brief sentence, therefore, at the beginning of a letter, I informed Miss Maidstone of its safe arrival. The remainder of the letter, of which I still have a copy, was perhaps the severest exposure of a female character that has ever been penned, with the possible exception of certain passages in the Book of Revelation.

Another document, of which I have a copy, and which was also indited by me, while in bed, was rendered necessary by the widespread local confusion between acute port-poisoning and ordinary inebriation—a confusion accentuated, and indeed never wholly dispersed, owing to the despicable attitude of Mr. Chrysostom. Thanks to the generosity, however, of my kind friend Simeon Whey, who had not been present at the meeting, I was enabled to print several hundreds of these for personal and vicarious distribution, agents being posted, upon the following Sunday, at the doors of St. Nicholas, Newington Butts, and, during the ensuing week, at the exits and

entrances of all my habitual haunts of prayer. In so far as I knew their addresses, too, the pamphlet was sent by post to the members of the *A.D.S.U.* and *S.P.S.D.T.*, and to such other persons as might reasonably have been presumed to have been present at the Porter Street Drill Hall.

For the most part, however, I lay for long hours either comatose or actually asleep, all my meals being brought to my bedside and consumed in a semi-recumbent posture. Nor, had they come, should I have been able to receive visitors, although I made an exception in favour of Simeon Whey, who bicycled from Balham every Wednesday and Saturday, not only as a friend, but also as a clergyman. Indeed in many ways I found his ministrations more soothing than those of my father, who had transferred both his Bible and the harmonium from the parlour downstairs to my bedroom. His voice, however, though still very powerful, was much more uncertain than it used to be, and I was usually obliged, after about three-quarters of an hour, to ask him to desist from further vocalization.

So the days passed, one after another, and each a little longer than the one before; and although I endeavoured to summon, and I trust not unsuccessfully, the whole of my accumulated spiri-

tual reserves, it was only by an effort that many would have judged superhuman that I began almost imperceptibly to regain my strength. Indeed, to at least one observer the spectacle I was now presenting was so fractionally short of a miracle that, as he wrote in his diary (for it was none other than Simeon) it "will never cease to be an inspiration to me." But let me quote the whole passage, written after I had been in bed for about a fortnight.

"To-day," he wrote, "I have again visited my poor friend, Augustus Carp, who is still laid aside on the bed of complete exhaustion as the result of the deception that I have already described; and more than ever, as I perceived him lying there, did I regret my absence from the meeting in question. Visibly flushed, although this may perhaps have been due to the imperfect absorption of a recent meal, his eyes were focussed upon a point in the ceiling with an almost tragic intensity, and the mute endurance with which he awaits the future will never cease to be an inspiration to me. Nor will he fail, as it seems to me, to need it. For with his chief means of sustenance rent away from him, it will probably become obligatory for him, as he has faintly whispered to me, to marry one of the sisters of Ezekiel Stool."

That is the whole passage, and I have thought well to include it not only as an encouragement to the afflicted but also as an indication of the poignant decision to which I was now slowly being forced, for, as I had instantly feared on leaving Mrs. Chrysostom, and as I had since perceived, alas, only too distinctly, I was face to face with just such a catastrophe as marriage with a Stool had been kept in reserve for. Nor had I been able to discern, bitterly though I had sought for it, any practicable alternative—or none that would preserve me from the personal indignity of applying for fresh employment without adequate references.

Any such employment, too, even if I were to obtain it, would inevitably be associated with a loss of income that would seriously cripple me in those fuller religious duties for which I was so evidently being prepared. For this at any rate had become abundantly clear to me—and indeed it was the sheet anchor by which I clung to life—that I could not but emerge from such an abyss of suffering enormously the richer in strength of character. More than ever, therefore, would it be desirable in future not only that I should be immune from financial anxiety but that I should have at my disposal a larger amount of leisure for my more sacred

avocations. Indeed, if this were possible, I felt that henceforward I should be entirely freed from the necessity for money-making, and thereby liberated for the completer uplifting of all with whom I might be brought into contact.

Such, then, were the conclusions to which I had been driven, and which I would already have communicated to Ezekiel, had the latter visited me on what Simeon has so well described as the bed of complete exhaustion. Since I had been carried from the meeting, however, to Miss Maidstone's vehicle—it was her two brothers who had borne me home—I had neither looked upon Ezekiel's face nor received a message from his lips; and this in spite of the fact that I had sent him six of my pamphlets for his own use and that of his sisters. I therefore decided, when I had accumulated sufficient strength—and this was not for another fortnight—to visit him in my own person, though naturally I did so with considerable reluctance.

Nor can I say that I was agreeably impressed either by his reception of me or his subsequent attitude, in which I could not but detect a good deal of that arrogance lately so manifest in his character. It was quite clear, however, that the subject of my errand did not take him by surprise, and indeed he assured me, almost at

once, that he had been expecting it for some days. He then remained silent with his back to his fire and continued to stare at me rather offensively.

"Do you mind," I said, "if I sit down?"

"Not at all," he replied. "You can do as you please."

I therefore did so, but so distant was his manner that it was difficult to reconcile it, as I immediately pointed out to him, either with his duty as a Xtian or his privileges as an host.

"In fact, you appear to have forgotten," I said, "though I pray I may be wrong, that I was once the means of saving your life."

He breathed unpleasantly through his right nostril.

"Very possibly," he said. "But to what end? To the deliberate ruination of the *A.D.S.U.* and all my prospects of marrying Miss Moonbeam."

"But, my dear Ezekiel," I began.

He interrupted me coldly.

"I must beg you in future," he said, "to call me Mr. Stool."

I stared at him.

"Call you Mr. Stool," I gasped, "after all these years of impassioned friendship?"

He waved his hand.

"I repudiate them," he said. "I repudiate them in their entirety."

I drew myself up to a right angle with my lap.

"But, Mr. Stool," I said, "surely you must realize the enormous magnitude of your escape?"

"Escape?" he said. "Escape from what?"

"Why, from the wickedness," I replied, "that I have been the means of revealing to you in the bottomless depths of Miss Moonbeam's heart."

He blew away the hair from before his lips.

"But I shouldn't have been marrying her wickedness," he said. "I should have been marrying herself."

"Herself?" I cried. "But you don't mean to tell me that you were attached to her as a female?"

"Yes, I do," he said. "Intensely. I was intensely attached to her as a female."

"But then, if you had married her," I said, "it wouldn't have been a sacrifice."

"How do you know?" he said. "How do you know it wouldn't?"

"Why, because you'd have liked it," I said. "You'd have liked marrying her."

"Well, of course," he replied. "And some people like sacrificing."

"But, my dear Mr. Stool," I began, "now that her wickedness has been revealed to you——"

"I don't care a damn," he said, "about her wickedness."

Had I been stronger, I should have leapt to my feet.

"You don't care a what?" I asked.

"A damn," he said.

"A damn?" I cried.

"Yes, a damn," he repeated.

I leaned back, closing my eyes.

"Yes, and I've said worse things."

I opened them again.

"I've said bally and hell and blow."

He paused for a moment.

"And I've said blast. That's the sort of man, Mr. Carp, that you've turned me into."

"But, my dear Mr. Stool," I said, "as your future brother-in-law——"

"Yes. But I'm not at all sure," he said, "that you will be."

Had I been erect, I should certainly have fallen. And indeed, as it was, I barely retained consciousness.

"But, Ezekiel," I cried, "Mr. Stool, surely you haven't forgotten your word of honour."

"No, I haven't," he said. "I haven't. But then you were a man without moral stain."

"And am I not now?" I asked. "Am I not now, Mr. Stool? Is the victim soiled by the criminal's guilt? Is the pioneer, drawn from the morass, responsible for his temporary discoloration?"

He was silent for a moment, but in so far as it was visible, his expression was far from reassuring. Then he rang the bell, and Tact entered the room. She was the less attractive of the two twins.

"That's the one," he said. "I made them draw lots. But you can only marry her on one condition—that you sign an agreement to live north of the Thames and make a home for her four sisters."

He tilted his chin a little and put his hands in his pockets. A distant dog barked three times. With a supreme effort I clung to my senses.

"Do you mean all," I whispered, "including Faith?"

Faith was the least attractive of the three triplets.

"All or none," he said.

He pulled out his watch.

I could hear it ticking.

"Why did you do that?" I asked.

"I'm giving you a minute," he said, "in which to decide."

Faint though I was, I staggered to my feet.

"Then as a Xtian," I said, "no less than a gentleman——"

"Thirty seconds," he said.

"I'll take her."

He replaced his watch, and I took Tact's hand. All the female Stools have poor circulations.

"So we'll be getting married," I said, "in due course."

"Yes," she said. "That'll be very nice."

Then her four sisters, who had evidently been waiting outside, came and shook hands with me with expressions of delight, and Ezekiel informed me that his solicitor would be in attendance the next morning.

I bowed a little stiffly.

"I shall be here," I said, and Ezekiel replied that he had no doubt of it.

Then I shook hands again with Tact and her sisters, bidding them good-bye for the present; and they bade me good-bye, also for the present, adding that they would be seeing me to-morrow.

"Yes, to-morrow," I said. "I'll be seeing you to-morrow."

"Then we'll say good-bye," they said, "till to-morrow."

"Yes, till to-morrow," I said, "to-morrow morning."

"Then we'll say good-bye," they said, "till to-morrow morning."

Nor did I fail to keep the appointment, though little did I dream, as I groped for the door, that not even yet had I been called upon to face the

ultimate temperature of my refining fire. For hardly had I arrived, somewhat fresher than I expected, at the garden gate of Mon Repos when there staggered up to it a railway omnibus, congested to the limit of its legal capacity. Deformed with luggage and distended with females, a single glance was sufficient to paralyse me, though less on my own account than on that of my father, who now stood transfixed on the doorstep. Then he gave a small cry of the extremest pathos, and as my mother's eight sisters descended to the pavement, he fell forward upon the garden path, never to rise again.

But it was too much even for me, shaken as I had been to my very foundations, and turning my back and covering my eyes from that hurrying, Welsh-speaking female flood, I fell forward parallel to my father, though with my head in the opposite direction.

CHAPTER XIX

Commencement of my life's afternoon. My father's eight sisters-in-law return to Wales. Astounding attitude of my mother. Physical effect thereof on myself. I move to Stoke Newington. Further parochial activities. Simeon Whey obtains a living. I move to Hornsey and become a Churchwarden. Complete decline of Ezekiel Stool. Birth of my son. A happy augury.

YES, I fell down; Nature could stand no more; and a discerning Providence, relenting at last, mercifully granted me a moment's oblivion while my mother's eight sisters swept over me. But I was never to be the same man again; and I have always regarded that unconscious moment as definitely conducting me into what has happily proved the long afternoon of my life. For it must not be thought that I am repining, or that, looking back over the intervening years, I am anything but grateful for that final ordeal, through which my character was required to pass. On the contrary—*post tenebras lux**—as I have often remarked to my wife and her sisters, I can only thank Heaven that I was considered worthy of so prolonged and fierce a discipline.

Nor do I propose, as I now turn, in this the final chapter of my book, to the quiet contempla-

* After darkness light.

tion of the fruitful activities with which my later life has been concerned—nor do I propose, I say, to linger unduly over the tragic incidents just recorded. Defeated in their object by what I have since been informed was the rupture of an important cerebral artery, my father's eight murderesses—for such, in fact, they were—were obliged to return again to Llanpwhllanpwh, though not until they had compelled me, on pain of attending his funeral, to purchase their tickets out of my father's estate.

Much more difficult, however, was the problem of my mother, who had thus unexpectedly survived her husband, and for whom I was therefore obliged, as I had promised my father, to make some sort of provision. This was the more harassing, too, in that my father's savings had been practically obliterated by his law costs, thereby reducing my own inheritance to the bare sum for which he had been insured. Further diminished by an iniquitous taxation, the settlement of bills, and the expenses of his interment, I was thus faced, in respect of my mother, with a singularly annoying predicament—and this at the very moment when my attention was fully occupied with the details of my wedding. Great was my satisfaction, therefore, when my fiancée, with an intelligence as welcome as it was un-

expected, suggested that my mother should continue her previous functions in the house that we had procured at Stoke Newington. She would thus not only be assured of food and shelter, but would enjoy the additional satisfaction of enabling us to dispense, in our new home, with the paid services of a cook.

"A good idea," I cried, "an excellent idea," and I remember Tact's pleasure when I gave her a kiss. So astounding, however, was my mother's reception of the plan that I was obliged to sit down for several minutes, while the scene recurred to me in the form of a nightmare on at least three occasions during the following fortnight.

"No," said my mother. "I'm very sorry, Augustus. But my future arrangements won't permit of it."

I stared at her.

"Your future arrangements?" I said.

"Yes," she replied. "I'm going to take a holiday."

It was then that I sat down.

"Take a holiday?" I asked.

"Yes, a holiday," she said. "Don't you think it's time?"

"But, my dear mother," I said, "what do you want a holiday for?"

"Why, just to see," she replied, "what it's like."

I felt the blood rush to my cheeks.

"But, my dear mother," I said, "I can't consent to that."

She folded her hands, not very agreeably.

"Then I'm afraid," she said, "that I shall have to go without."

I looked at her.

"Go without?" I asked. "But you can't. You haven't any money."

She smiled a little.

"Oh, yes, I have," she said. "Quite sufficient for my purpose."

I bent forward for a moment, struggling for breath.

"Sufficient for your purpose?" I asked. "But where did you get it?"

"Oh, I've always saved a bit," she said, "and taken good advice, and I bought an annuity yesterday morning."

"An annuity?" I repeated. "You've saved enough for that?"

"Yes, and a little more," she said, "to play about with."

"But, my dear mother," I said, "what did you save it out of?"

"Out of my housekeeping money," she said.

"I made it rather a hobby."

I rose to my feet again.

"Then what it amounts to," I said, "is that you've been robbing my poor father."

"I think not," she said, "though you can consult Mr. Balfour Whey, of course. But you must remember that I've had no wages."

"Wages?" I cried. "But you weren't a servant."

"No, that's true," she said. "I was only a wife."

"And a mother," I reminded her. "You seem to forget that."

"Not at all," she replied. "I remember it distinctly."

I looked at her sternly.

"Then am I to understand," I asked, "that you entirely refuse to accept my offer?"

"Yes, I'm afraid so," she said. "I'm going to Paris, and then to a little place on the Riviera."

I resumed my seat rather heavily.

"To Paris?" I said. "But you don't know the language."

"*Pas trop*," she said, "*mais ça suffit*. And besides, I shall be staying with Emily Smith."

Totally unmanned, I wiped my forehead.

"But I thought she was in service," I said, "in Aberdeen."

My mother smiled again.

"Oh, no," she replied. "She's running an hotel near Bordighera."

Then, as the room rocked, I clutched at the arms of my chair.

"I'm feeling unwell," I said. "I'm going to be sick."

"Yes, I was afraid," said my mother, "that you might be. You oughtn't to have eaten quite so much dinner."

Thus with a heartlessness only the more incredible in view of the atmosphere with which she had been surrounded, my mother withdrew from her son's life, needless to say never to re-enter it; and we were consequently obliged to procure a professional cook at a not inconsiderable monthly wage.

Apart from this, however, after a satisfactory wedding service, adequately conducted by the Reverend Simeon Whey, the earlier years of my matrimonial life may be passed over without particular comment. Subject to my agreement with Ezekiel, who was now deteriorating almost every day, I had obtained, as I have said, a house at Stoke Newington, within easy distance of St. Gregory's Church. Here, like my father, I soon made myself a sidesman, and within three or four months of joining the congregation, I had become

the means of distributing the parish magazine in Longfellow Crescent and Byron Square. From that it was but a step to auditing the accounts of the Band of Hope and the Additional Blanket Fund, and in a very few years I was perhaps the most prominent figure in the parochial life of St. Gregory's. Nor must it be supposed that I had entirely severed myself from all my previous regenerative interests. From the Anti-Dramatic and Saltatory Union it was true that I had deemed it better to resign, and indeed this body, lacking the support of Ezekiel, concluded its activities shortly afterwards. But I still retained my membership of the Non-Smokers' League, and for some years have been its deputy chairman, while I had had myself transferred, on moving to Stoke Newington, to the Dalston Division of the *S.P.S.D.T.*

Perhaps the happiest day, however, of this period of my life, and the one that finally led me to my present abode, was the October Saturday on which I heard from Simeon Whey that he had obtained the living of St. Potamus, Hornsey. As this was only achieved after long years of practically ceaseless struggle, he wept in my arms, I remember, for nearly an hour, my wife and her sisters adding contributory tears.

"Nor will my happiness," he said, "be com-

plete—kck—until I have seen the name of Augustus Carp publicly inscribed—kck—on the church notice board, as one of the churchwardens of my parish.”

Without delay, therefore, I resolved to transfer my worship to the church presided over by my friend, and within six months I had obtained the ten years’ tenancy of Wilhelmina, Nassington Park Gardens. This I have since renewed, and as sidesman, churchwarden, Sunday School superintendent and secretary of the Glee Club, no less than as President of the St. Potamus Purity League, I could scarcely have done otherwise. And indeed I rather fear that were I to suggest leaving, I should be forcibly prevented by my fellow-parishioners. My wife and her sisters, too, as they have frequently told me, have never regretted leaving Camberwell, slightly disturbed, as they have occasionally been, by the acute decline of their brother Ezekiel.

They have seldom seen him, however, and then but accidentally, and as for myself I have only met him once, when I chanced to encounter him at the entrance of the Albany, where, as I understood, he then had chambers. Completely shaved and evidently massaged, he was flicking a particle of dust from his left coat-sleeve, and on catching sight of me, he surveyed me through

a monocle with a thin gold chain and a tortoiseshell rim.

"Hullo, Carp," he said. "Taxi," and a taxi being present, I was spared from replying.

Nor have I been denied—albeit it was not until a year ago that Providence saw fit to reward my efforts—the crowning satisfaction of becoming the father of a small, but still surviving, boy; and the happiest auguries, I think, can safely be discerned in the circumstances surrounding his birth. Indeed so amazingly similar were these to those ushering in my own that I cannot do better, perhaps, than close this volume with a scene from which my readers, I hope, will derive as intense a joy as that which was conferred upon myself.

Born at half-past three on a February morning, the world having been decked with a slight snowfall, it was then that the trained nurse in attendance on the case opened the bedroom door and emerged on the landing. I had gone outside to lean over the gate, and was still leaning there when she opened the door, but Faith and Hope, with Simeon Whey's housekeeper, were standing with bowed heads at the foot of the stairs. Prone in the parlour, and stretched in uneasy attitudes Charity and Understanding were snatching a troubled sleep, while two female members of the

St. Potamus Purity League were upon their knees in the back kitchen. But for the fact indeed that Charity and Understanding had slight impediments in their noses, the whole house would have been wrapped in the profoundest stillness.

Simeon Whey's housekeeper was the first to see the nurse, though she only saw her, as it were, through a mist. The nurse was the first to speak in a voice tremulous with emotion.

"Where's Mr. Carp?" she said.

"He's just gone outside," said Simeon Whey's housekeeper.

Something splashed heavily on the hall linoleum. It was a drop of moisture from the nurse's forehead.

"Tell him," she said, "that he's the father of a son."

Simeon Whey's housekeeper gave a great cry. I was beside her in a single leap. Always highly coloured, I have since been assured that my face seemed literally on fire. The two fellow-members of the St. Potamus Purity League, accompanied by Charity and Understanding, rushed into the hall. The nurse leaned over the banisters.

"A boy," she said. "It's a boy."

"A boy?" I said.

"Yes, a boy," said the nurse.

There was a moment's hush, and then Nature had its way. Unashamedly I burst into tears. Simeon Whey's housekeeper kissed me on the neck just as the two fellow-members burst into a hymn; and a moment later, Charity and Understanding burst simultaneously into the doxology. Then I recovered myself and held up my hand.

"I shall call him Augustus," I said, "after myself."

"Or tin?" suggested Simeon Whey's housekeeper. "What about calling him tin, after the saint?"

"How do you mean tin?" I said.

"Augus-tin," said Charity.

But I shook my head.

"No, it shall be tus," I said. "Tus is better than tin."

Then Charity and Understanding resumed the singing, from which the two fellow-members had been unable to desist, until after rapidly thinking, and coming to a further decision, I once again held up my hand.

"And I shall give Simeon Whey," I said, "the first opportunity of becoming Augustus's godfather."

Then I took a deep breath, threw back my shoulders, tilted my chin, and closed my eyes; and with the full vigour of my immense voice, I, too, joined in the doxology.



TEN POEMS

Six from "Poems, 1914-27"

Four hitherto unpublished

by

ROBERT GRAVES

TEN POEMS

PURE DEATH

This I admit, Death is terrible to me,
To no man more so, naturally,
And I have disenthralled my natural terror
Of every comfortable philosopher
Or tall dark doctor of divinity:
Death stands again in his true rank and order.

Therefore it was, when between you and me
Giving presents became a malady,
The exchange increasing surplus on each side
Till there was nothing but ungivable pride
That was not over-given, and this degree
Called a conclusion not to be denied,

That we at last bethought ourselves, made shift
And simultaneously this final gift
Gave. Each with shaking hands unlocks
The sinister, long, brass-bound coffin-box,
Unwraps pure Death, with such bewilderment
As greeted our love's first accomplishment.

THE COOL WEB

Children are dumb to say how hot the day is,
How hot the scent is of the summer rose,
How dreadful the black wastes of evening sky,
How dreadful the tall soldiers drumming by.

But we have speech, that cools the hottest sun,
And speech that dulls the hottest rose's scent.
We spell away the overhanging night,
We spell away the soldiers and the fright.

TEN POEMS

There's a cool web of language winds us in,
Retreat from too much gladness, too much fear:
We grow sea-green at last and coldly die
In brinness and volubility.

But if we let our tongues lose self-possession,
Throwing off language and its wateriness
Before our death, instead of when death comes,
Facing the brightness of the children's day,
Facing the rose, the dark sky and the drums,
We shall go mad no doubt and die that way.

THE DEAD SHIP

So, overmasterful, to sea!
But hope no distant view of sail,
No growling ice, nor weed, nor whale,
Nor breakers perilous on the lee.

Though you enlarge your angry mind
Three leagues and more about the ship
And stamp till every puncheon skip,
The wake runs evenly behind.

And it has width enough for you,
This vessel, dead from truck to keel
With an ignoble random wheel,
A blank chart and a surly crew,

In ballast only due to fetch
The turning-point of wretchedness
On an uncoasted featureless
And barren ocean of blue stretch.

THE LOST ACRES

These acres, always again lost
By each new Ordnance-survey
And searched for at exhausting cost
Of time and thought, are still away

TEN POEMS

They have their paper-substitute—
Intercalation of an inch
At the so many thousandth foot:
And no one parish feels the pinch.

But lost they are, despite all care,
So perhaps likeliest to be bound
Together in a piece somewhere,
A plot of undiscovered ground.

Invisible they have the spite
To swerve the tautest measuring chain
And the exact theodolite
Perched every side of them in vain.

Yet there's no scientific need
To plot these acres in the mind
With prehistoric fern and reed
And monsters such as heroes find.

They have, no doubt, their flowers, their birds,
Their trees behind the phantom fence,
But of the substance of mere words:
To walk there would be loss of sense.

THE AWKWARD GARDENER

Loveliest flowers, though crooked in their border,
And glorious fruit, dangling from ill-pruned boughs—
Be sure the gardener had not eye enough
To wheel a barrow between the broadest gates
Without a clumsy scraping.

Yet none could think it simple awkwardness:
And when he stammered of a garden-guardian,
That the smooth lawns came by angelic favour,
The pinks and pears in spite of his own blunders,
They nudged at this conceit.

TEN POEMS

Well, he had something, though he called it nothing—
An ass's wit, a hairy-belly shrewdness
That could appraise the intentions of the angel
By the very distance of his own confusion
And bring the most to pass.

THE PHILATELIST-ROYAL

The Philatelist Royal
Was always too loyal
To say what he honestly
Thought of Philately.

Must it rank as Science?
Then he had more reliance,
(As he told the Press wittily),
In Royal Philately
Than in all your geologies,
All your psychologies,
Bacteriologies,
Physics and such.
It was honester, much,
Free of mere speculations
And doubtful equations
So therefore more true
From a pure science view
Than other school courses:
For Nature's blind forces
Here alone, they must own,
Played no meddlesome part.
It was better than Art:
It enforced education,
It strengthened the nation
In the arts of mensuration
And colour-discrimination,

TEN POEMS

In cleanliness, in hope,
In use of the microscope,
In mercantile transactions,
In a love of abstractions,
In geography and history.
It was a noble mystery,
So he told them again
That Philately's reign,
So mild and humane,
Would surely last longer,
Would surely prove stronger
Than the Glory of Greece,
Than the Grandeur of Rome.
It brought goodwill and peace
Wherever it found a home.
It was more democratic
More full, more ecstatic,
Than the Bible, the Bottle,
The Complete Works of Aristotle,
And worthier and betterer
And etceterier and etcetera.

The Philatelist Royal
Was always too loyal
To say what he honestly
Thought of Philately.

TO THE READER OVER MY SHOULDER

You, reading over my shoulder, peering beneath
My writing arm—I suddenly feel your breath
Hot on my hand or on my nape,
So interrupt my theme, scratching these few
Words on the margin for you, namely you
Too-human shape fixed in that shape:—

TEN POEMS

All the saying of things against myself
And for myself I have well done myself,
What now, old enemy, shall you do
But quote and underline, thrusting yourself
Against me, as ambassador of myself,
In damned confusion of myself and you?

For you in strutting, you in sycophancy
Have played too long this other self of me,
Doubling the part of judge and patron
With that of creaking grind-stone to my wit.
Know me, have done: I am a clean spirit
And you for ever flesh. Have done.

THE BEAST

Edmund Spenser loathed the Blatant Beast,
Yet to the history's end withheld the stroke
That must, he knew, provoke
Rancour in men that loved the monster least.

And this was prudence: while the Beast lives
The infamy of his ravage is delight
And to the Red Cross Knight
A fore-won laurel of salvation gives.

But the Beast killed is carrion and a worse
Than carrion: which old Spenser would not tell
Knowing his Faerie well—
Therefore to me it falls to write that curse.

This foul Beast, then, was finally overcome
And in no secret combat: the whole city
Flocked out and groaned for pity
To see the Red Cross Knight urge the blade home.

TEN POEMS

Duly they danced, and sang the triumphs due,
Roasting whole oxen on the public spit;
Twelve mountain peaks were lit
With bonfires: yet their hearts were doubt and rue.

Therefore no grave was deep enough to hold
The Beast, which after days came thrusting out,
Wormy from rump to snout,
His dragged cere-cloth foul with the grave's mould.

Nor could sea hold him: anchored with great stones
He swelled and buoyed them up, paddling to shore
As evident as before
With deep-sea ooze and salty creaking bones.

Lime could not burn him, nor the hot coal-fire:
So often as the good Knight bound him there,
With stink of singeing hair
And scorching flesh the corpse rolled from the pyre.

In the city-gutter would the Beast lie
Praising the Knight for his high valorous deeds:
"Ay, on those water-meads
He slew even me. These death-wounds testify."

The Knight governed that city, a man shamed
And shrunken; for the Beast was over-dead,
With wounds no longer red
But gangrenous and loathsome and inflamed.

Not all the righteous judgments he could utter,
Nor mild laws frame, nor public works repair,
Nor wars wage, in despair,
Could bury that same Beast, crouched in the gutter.

TEN POEMS

A fresh-remembrance-banquet to forestall
The Knight turned hermit, went without farewell
To a far mountain-cell:
But the Beast followed as his seneschal,

And there drew water for him and hewed wood
With vacant howling laughter; else all day
Noisome with long decay
Sunning himself at the cave's entry stood.

He would bawl to pilgrims for a dole of bread
To feed the sick saint who once vanquished him
With spear so stark and grim:
Would set a pillow of grass beneath his head,
Would fetch him fever-wort from the pool's brim;
And crept into his grave when he was dead.

THE TERRACED VALLEY

In a deep thought of you and concentration
I came by hazard to a strange region:
The unnecessary sun was not there,
The necessary earth was without care,
Broad sunshine ripened the whole skin
Of ancient earth that was turned outside-in.

Calm sea beyond the terraced valley
Without horizon easily was spread
As it were overhead
Washing the mountain-spurs behind me:
The unnecessary sky was not there,
Therefore no heights, no deeps, no birds of the air.

TEN POEMS

Neat outside-inside, neat below-above
Hermaphrodising love.
Neat this-way-that-way and without mistake:
On the right hand could slide the left glove.
Neat over-under: the young snake
Through an unbreaking shell his path could break.
Singing of kettles, like a singing brook,
Made out of doors a fireside nook.

But you, my love, where had you then your station?
Seeing that on this common earth together
We go not distant from each other
I knew you near me in that strange region,
So searched for you, in hope to see you stand
On some near olive-terrace, in the heat,
The left-hand glove drawn on your right hand,
The empty snake's egg perfect at your feet—
But found you nowhere in the whole land,
And cried disconsolately, until you spoke
Close in the sunshine by me, and your voice broke
That antique spell with a doom-echoing shout
To once more inside-in and outside-out.

TAIL PIECE: A SONG TO MAKE YOU AND ME LAUGH

Let me tell you the story of how I began:
I began as the knife-boy and ended as the boot-man,
With nothing in my pockets but a jack-knife and a
button,
With nothing in my pockets but a jack-knife and a
button,
With nothing in my pockets.

TEN POEMS

Let me tell you the story of how I went on:
I began as the lift-boy and ended as the lift-man,
With nothing in my pockets but a jack-knife and a
button,
With nothing in my pockets but a jack-knife and a
button,
With nothing in my pockets.

I found it very easy to whistle and play
With nothing in my head or my pockets all day,
With nothing in my pockets.

But along came Old Eagle, like Moses or David, °
He stopped at the fourth floor and preached me
Damnation:

“Not a soul shall be savèd, not one shall be savèd.
The whole First Creation shall forfeit salvation:
From knife-boy to lift-boy, from ragged to regal,
Not one shall be savèd, not you, nor Old Eagle,
No soul on earth escapeth, even if all repent—”
So I cut the cords of the lift and down we went,
With nothing in our pockets.

*Can a phonograph lie? Can a phonograph lie?
Can a, can a phonograph?
A song very neatly
Contrived to make you and me
Laugh.*



THE PERFECT MURDER CASE

A Detective Novel

by

CHRISTOPHER BUSH

The Perfect Murder Case

CHAPTER I

BY WAY OF PROLOGUE

A PROLOGUE is often an annoying thing since it may tell too much or too little. Those however that are worth having may be regarded as the cocktail that precedes the really sound meal; those that are not, as the longwinded conversation with strangers that is often the prelude to an indifferent one.

As for this chapter the reader will have to judge for himself. The fact that it has to be apologised for should either make him suspicious of it at the outset or else fairly confident that it would never have been perpetrated had it been avoidable. There are for instance, one or two things that may be said in defence of its appearance, if not for the manner of its presentation. For one thing you will be spared the trouble, if you get so far, of harking back to the past. You will be able to take the meal in your stride and swallow it in the order of its courses. Moreover, if you are an amateur detective you are forthwith assured that it contains the solution of the mystery or at least its main ingredients are there put before you.

The short episodes which directly preceded the actual murder and which form this prologue are not however necessarily in chronological order.

THE PERFECT MURDER CASE

One of them is moreover hypothetical. Nevertheless the facts as described in it must have been so nearly true as makes no difference and even if the individual actions which compose it are wrong, yet the scene as a whole is not falsely presented.

(A)

Mrs. Wilford must have been a sensible sort of soul. As she kissed her daughter and saw the tear-stains and the redness of the eyes which betokened a miserable three hours in the train she showed no signs of the perturbation she must have been feeling. Indeed she took charge of the situation like a wary and competent nurse. She first possessed herself of the small case and the wicker basket.

"Well, how are you my dear?" and without waiting for an answer, "Is this all the luggage you've got?"

"There's only one trunk in the van," began Milly forlornly and forthwith a porter was hailed, the trunk was on a barrow and before the daughter was hardly aware that she had arrived at Thetford she was in a taxi and moving homewards. But there was a brief expostulation at the expense.

"Mother, you shouldn't really! We could have waited for the bus."

"Now dear; you let me have my own way for once," replied her mother. "We'll be home in two ticks and the kettle's all ready." Then feeling the urgency for conversation, however inconsequent, "And what sort of weather have you been having, dear?"

BY WAY OF PROLOGUE

But it was when they got inside the small living-room of the tiny villa that Milly broke down. Familiar things and the inevitable rush of memories were too much. Both women had a good cry and when the daughter finally wiped her eyes it could be seen that she had summoned from somewhere a new fortitude.

"Crying won't do any good, mother. And there's plenty of time to see what we're going to do."

But over the tea there was no talking of generalities. To the older woman it was still a thing incredible and irreligious that a wife should leave her husband. The situation was cutting clean across a comfortable morality and yet, much as she would have liked to argue on divine injunctions, she realised that the position required some circumspection and must be approached by devious ways.

"What have you done with the flat, dear?"

"Given it up, mother, and sold every stick we had except what I've brought with me. If Fred wants to do any explaining he ought to know where to find me."

The mother thought about that for a moment. "You're right, dear. A girl's place is with her mother when all's said and done."

"Oh, you might as well know everything," burst out Milly passionately. "I didn't want to upset you, mother, and that's why I said Fred and I couldn't hit it off and were going to separate and I was coming home for a bit." She flew to her handbag on the dresser and returned as quickly with a letter which she fairly thrust into her mother's hands. "You read that, mother, and you'll see for yourself."

THE PERFECT MURDER CASE

Suppose that you as a detective had examined that letter with scrupulous exactitude, realising that your inferences might mean the difference between life and death. This is what you would have noticed.

The envelope matched the paper which had probably been torn from a block, and hastily if the ragged top were a guide. Both were of poor quality and the pinkish shade indicated lack of taste, expediency or purchase by artificial light. The former was belied by the writing which seemed to have a certain character about it. The place of posting was Holloway and the time stamp showed 7.30 p.m. So jagged was the tear of the envelope that the opener must have been in haste or completely indifferent. The letter must have been pored over manytimes since one of its creases had become a slit. It had no date and no address. The envelope had however two addresses; the original to Thetford in a man's hand and a second for re-posting to a London address, this latter in the quavering hand of an elderly woman.

Dear Aggie,

I was very glad to get your letter but sorry to hear about your rheumatism. If you take my advice you will on no account do as you suggest; go and stay with Tom's wife. Stuck down in the mud as it is, Great Oxley is no good for rheumatism and nobody could ever think otherwise if he had any sense. Change of air doesn't cure all rheumatic cases and so surely one needn't expect it to be a certainty in yours.

You are not to trouble about me either. I am

BY WAY OF PROLOGUE

absolutely all right and doing fine and may have to go abroad on business if I hold the job I'm on. At present I'm only on trial but when I do see you again the news ought to make a real record if everything doesn't go wrong in the meanwhile.

The money is to help you out until I see you again. I may be able to send an address some time soon but in any case don't worry.

In great haste,

With love as ever,

FRED.

P.S.—I expect I shall roll up like a bad penny one of these fine days when you least expect it.

The perplexity on the mother's face grew as she read and when she gave back the letter she could find no words. But her face seemed one unspoken doubt. Then she felt that something had to be said and in a less tragic situation the naïvety of the remark would have been droll.

"But dear, your name isn't Aggie!"

"I know it isn't, mother. And I've never had rheumatism or written a letter. Keeping two homes going; that's what he's been doing, and put the letters in the wrong envelopes. Just a bit too clever this time." There was no sign of tears now; nothing but a cold intensity.

The mother laid her hand on her daughter's knee. "Tell me dear. When did you see Fred last?"

"You know mother; when I told you he was looking for a job. He went off that morning and didn't say where he was going and then a week after that

I got a letter with ten pounds in it and he said he thought he'd got a job but he had to keep quiet about it and there was an address I could write to. Then I thought I'd go to his address instead and when I went they said they didn't know anything about him. Then I got another a few days later full of all sorts of rubbish and I couldn't make head nor tail of it—you know, mother, the first one you sent on from here—and I was so angry I threw it in the fire. That had ten pounds in it too. Then the next was this letter and that had twenty pounds in it. But *she* didn't get it!" This last venomous and triumphant.

.

(B)

In the front sitting-room of a villa within a few hundred yards of Finsbury Park Tube Station and on a September evening, two men were engaged in what might have been a serious business conference. Whether it was that the gas mantle had designedly been turned down or that it was faulty could not be said, but whatever it was, the light was uncertain and the drab furnishing of the room could with difficulty be distinguished in the remoter corners.

Of the two men one had resorted to the most threadbare artifice in the interviewer's repertory—he had his back to the light. He wore glasses and his moustache was dark and heavy. From what could be seen of him he was an incongruity in that particular setting; his clothes for instance were well

cut and he wore them with a difference. There was a kind of incisive air about him and you might almost have persuaded yourself that here was the product of a public school. But then again you might have hesitated. There was something wrong somewhere though hardly to be placed; a false gesture perhaps or an intonation.

The other man might have been a senior clerk or a shop-assistant of the best type. His grey suit was neat and the black tie gave an air of restraint. His age was probably about thirty, his height slightly under the average and his figure slim but athletic. At this moment his face was the most arresting thing in the room, not so much because the little light caught it fully as from its deadly seriousness. His eyes were fixed upon the other with such intent that they scarcely flickered. It seemed as he would catch not only every word but as if the missing of the least syllable might mean everything that mattered. It is to the end of their conversation that we are listening.

The first sentence showed which of the two men was in command, if the placing of the chairs had not already told it.

"As far as you yourself are concerned, Wilkinson, you are perfectly satisfied?" The voice was almost intoned, so monotonous was its level.

The other showed a certain nervousness or maybe eagerness or a desire to please. "Yes sir; I'm perfectly satisfied, if you are."

"That's all right then. I might as well tell you by the way that my superior to whom I have to report is particularly pleased with the way you're shaping. The Secret Service—and always remem-

ber this—rarely praises and it never forgives mistakes.”

The other began half stammeringly to express his thanks but the voice cut in with a finality that was chilling.

“As you were told, everything is up to you. Now for your new instructions. This is Thursday. You will catch the 9.0 p.m. from King’s Cross for Peterboro where a room has been engaged for you at the ‘George’. Just before ten to-morrow morning you will go to Flanders Road and watch as unobtrusively as you can No. 35. If there leaves it or visits it a tall, thin man of foreign appearance, you will follow him and note his actions. If however there is no sign of him by 2.0 p.m. it will be certain that he is not coming. In that case as soon as it is dusk you will go to a spot opposite the police station and keep your eyes fixed on the door. Keep both hands in the pocket of your overcoat and act as if you were waiting for a friend. If during the two hours you are there a man or woman asks you for a match and remarks, “The matches they sell nowadays are getting worse and worse,” you will follow that person until you are given an envelope. With it you will return here at the earliest possible moment. If not, you will repeat the procedure the next two days and if still unsuccessful will return by the 7.25 p.m. on Monday. Repeat please.”

The instructions were repeated and from the amazing correctness of the repetition one could have been certain it was not the first time such a performance had been gone through.

“In the room are the bag and the suit you will

wear. Retain gloves as last time. Repack the bag and leave it locked." From a pocketbook he took a thin wad of notes and told out five. "These are for expenses." He replaced the balance and from the bulging contents of the book produced a slip of paper. "The usual receipt, please."

The other scanned the slip carefully and then signed his name—"Arthur Wilkinson."

"Anything else before I change, sir?"

"Nothing else Wilkinson, thank you."

Ten minutes later there was a further curious ritual.

"Everything in order, Wilkinson?"

"Yes, sir."

"The disc then please."

From his hip pocket the other took what looked like a button and passed it over for inspection. On receiving it again he examined it carefully.

"This is not the one I gave you, sir!"

"Good work, Wilkinson!" The button was handed back and the original given in exchange for it was placed in the hip pocket with special care. Then he picked up a small case he had brought from the inner room and moved to the side door.

"Good night, sir."

"Good night Wilkinson, and good luck." Then came an addition that showed the speaker was really human. "I expect I shall be a good while yet. It's a good thing you're not married. Nobody to grumble at *your* being late for meals!"

The door closed quietly. From his pocket the man with the glasses took a bundle of slips fastened with a rubber band and with them he placed the last receipt. Save for the amounts all were alike

THE PERFECT MURDER CASE

in their wording but the signatures were all different. Yet strangely enough there was about them all something curiously alike.

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(c)

When they reached the end of the platform Geoffrey Wrentham looked round for Ludo's car and, not seeing it, for a taxi.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you," said Ludovic Travers, "but I've got a job of work I want to do. Do you mind if we walk?"

"Not a bit," said Wrentham and then added hastily, "That is if it isn't a marathon."

When they were in the straight for Southampton Row, Ludo explained. "I knew I should be meeting you here and I rather thought you might be interested." He fumbled in his waistcoat pocket and produced a newspaper cutting; then passed it over without comment.

Leading British Film Company requires actor to take Gene Allen parts in forthcoming productions. Big salary to right man. Apply personally 9.0 a.m. to 4.0 p.m. to-day and to-morrow at 75 Maryford Sq., Holborn.

Wrentham's joke was rather laboured. "You're not counting on me for a testimonial?"

Ludo smiled. He had known Geoffrey Wrentham far too long to be ignorant of the implied request for information. And the other knew too

that a busy fellow like Ludo had no time to waste over unecessaries at eleven in the morning. Weird sort of bird, Ludo! You never knew what the devil he was driving at.

"I take it you've seen Gene Allen?" said Ludo.

"On the screen you mean? Can't say I have. Name seems familiar though."

"Well, you can take it from me that in less than a year you'll know him well enough," said Ludo oracularly.

"What's the idea, Ludo? You getting a movie fan?"

"In a way I suppose. Still, perhaps I was a bit premature. But I do think this chap will get the mantle of Chaplin. He's mobile and not too effervescent. He's refreshingly original and not too much at the mercy of his scenario."

"What's he like, this chap? Allen did you say?"

"Gene Allen. It's rather difficult to put into words. You see he isn't a set type with a fixed make-up. I've seen him as the hen-pecked father of a flapper family, as an insurance agent and as . . . oh yes, he was the doctor in that delightful screen version of 'Makeshifts'."

"Yes; but why is he funny?"

Ludo took off his glasses and polished them; a sign that the question required thought.

"That's frightfully difficult," he began diffidently. "After all, humour of the better sort is incapable of analysis. The man's a genius of course, and of a particularly sympathetic type. Everything he does seems so intimate and personal. He makes just the kind of fool of himself that we all do. When you see him dropping bricks you feel

you want to say, 'There but for the grace of God goes myself.' "

"Yes; but what sort of a face has he got?"

"That's what I'm bringing you along for. Actually I suppose his face is unique. I couldn't describe it but I could recognise it anywhere under certain conditions. You see," he went on, "what is really fascinating about this advertisement is what it's going to show us. Fancy for instance an advertisement for a Charlie Chaplin; the monotony of a queue of hundreds of moustaches, bowler hats, splay feet and baggy breeks. Now you see what I'm getting at. If there's a queue for this job and I expect there will be, just what will the applicants be like? What will be their conception of the face, figure and even personality of Gene Allen? That's what's intriguing me. Oh, this rather looks as if we were there."

There certainly was a queue. It extended two-deep along the south and east sides of the square. By Fishwick's antique shop a policeman was falling-in the stragglers and at the head a kind of commissioner in mufti was admitting the first-comers into what looked like the side door of a shop. The usual crowd of sightseers had collected and under their scrutiny it must have been hard to maintain a pose of serene indifference.

The two stood there for a good ten minutes, one peering intently through his hornrims and the other bored to extinction. To him the crowd was a collection of fairly uniform but decidedly seedy individuals. The uniformity was due, had he known it, to the screwed-up eyes and look of puzzled wonder wherewith the queue sought to

imitate the face of the original; a look Allen-esque enough and reasonably obvious.

As a matter of fact the chief thought that ran through Wrentham's mind was one of fervent prayer that nobody whose opinion he valued should see him doing something so blatant and beyond the pale. All very well for Ludo with a reputation for eccentricity and his don't-give-a-damn attitude. It was with difficulty therefore that he refrained from a petulant comment at his companion's, "Well, shall we move on now?"

What he did say was, "Spotted the winner, Ludo?"

"Hardly that," was the reply. "Still, there were one or two extraordinary types. Do you know, Geoffrey," he went on, perfectly unaware of the other's indifference, "I really am convinced that these new film corporations are making a very definite mistake in retaining American types. I don't mean importing ready-made artists from Hollywood; that of course is unpardonable. Don't you agree?"

"Don't give two hoots," replied Wrentham sardonically. Ludo looked pained. Then he agreed tentatively. "Perhaps you're right. Still, it's an awful pity. If you'd seen those early pictures made. . . ."

CHAPTER II

THE MARIUS LETTERS

(A)

HAD the now famous letter of the 7th of October, 193—, arrived at the editorial offices of the *Daily Record* at so late an hour as 9.30 p.m., it could have assisted in a much more exciting chapter than this is likely to be. We could have seen the Night Editor on the telephone in a desperate attempt to summon a special conference; the attenuated gathering; the waiting for the verdict of Scotland Yard; the holding up of the printer and finally, on the very last dot of the very last minute the copy let loose and the presses humming. It might have been quite a movie story with its fight against time and the Editress of the Children's Corner dragged in as heroine.

As a matter of fact the letter caused no perturbation and its arrival was positively prosaic. The morning's mail arrived as usual and some hundreds of letters found their way to the News Editor. Before the arrival of the Managing Editor they had been sorted out. Of the hundred and thirty-five communications for instance, intended by their writers for the "From Our Readers" column, he retained exactly a dozen for final selection and the rest were very definitely W.P.B.

THE MARIUS LETTERS

Among these dozen was the "Marius" letter, retained not as a valuable or chatty contribution from a reader but because of its possible news value. Indeed it had been obvious from the first to so trained an observer that here was matter for the General News Page and not for the Correspondence Column. It was moreover so entertaining that he read it twice and carefully at that.

October 7th, 193—.

Dear Sir,

I am going to commit a murder.

I offer no apology for the curtness of the statement. Had I not attracted your attention however, the prolix defence which now follows would never have been read.

Firstly, the murder has to be committed and I assure you there is no other way out of the peculiar and difficult situation in which I find myself. Why then am I announcing my intentions?

The reasons briefly are these. I have stated that the murder is inevitable. By announcing it therefore I give the law due warning and a fair chance. If I am caught the law will demand my neck; nevertheless by giving the law its sporting chance I raise the affair from the brutal to the human. At the same time I shall be satisfying to some extent my own conscience.

You may say that the law needs no such sporting chance and there I think you are wrong. Because I am driven to commit a murder, that is no reason why I should not save my neck. I

THE PERFECT MURDER CASE

venture for instance to call the murder I am about to commit "The Perfect Murder" since though I say I am about to commit it, that involves no admission that I have the least apprehension of being caught.

Speaking recently at a dinner on the occasion of the visit to England of the Commissioner of the New York Police the Home Secretary remarked—somewhat gratuitously I thought at the time—that the chance of a murderer's escaping was a very small one. He forgot very conveniently that in the last seven years there have been twenty murder mysteries. By this time next year there will be twenty-one.

Now as to actual facts. As near as I can at present judge the murder will take place on the night of the 11th inst. and in a district of London north of the Thames. It will be no cowardly cut-and-run business or furtive blow in the dark but reasonably open and above board. Before the event itself I will give you fuller particulars.

A copy of this letter has been sent to all the principal London dailies and to New Scotland Yard.

May I add that I am utterly and most boringly sane.

I have the honour to be,
Yours etc.,
MARIUS.

When the Managing Editor came in he passed it over. "Something rather unusual, don't you think?"

Briggs had a look at it, scowled at the first line and then settled down to read it in earnest. "Rather

like a hoax," was his comment. "Have you got it on the statement?"

"No. I wanted you to have a look at it."

"That's three I can remember in the last two years," said Briggs reminiscently. "The others were fearful bilge. This chap's a bit talkative and writes like a dutch uncle." He had another look at it. "Be rather interesting to hear what everybody else is doing about it."

"Mac will probably have all the news there is," suggested Holloway.

Briggs turned to the secretary. "George; ring up the N.P.A. and ask for McKay urgent." Then while the call was coming he set about yet another reading.

His end of the telephone conversation was something like this. "Hallo! That you Mac? . . . Yes, Briggs speaking. Do you know anything about a letter signed 'Marius' in which the writer . . . Oh you have! Yes . . . Very good. In half an hour? Good-bye!"

He passed the letter over. "Four copies, George; absolutely confidential." Then to Holloway, "Mac seems to have got hold of something from various quarters. He says he'll pass on the dope in half an hour. You might see to Peters, will you?"

When McKay did ring up however, his unofficial news was that the letter was being published but would on no account get into the evening papers. If however there was no further communication they might take it that publication was not against the public interest. "Useful chap, Mac!" remarked Briggs. "Still, we should have published in any case unless Scotland Yard stepped in."

Forthwith the letter was put on the midday conference statement. Peters, the crime expert of the *Record* had already got to work. The postal district and time of collection he had obtained from the envelope. Then he got an enlarged facsimile of both it and the letter. Between the two conferences it was up to him to find if possible the postman who collected the letter and the box into which it had been put. He also consulted Godovski of Harvard St. and ascertained that the typewriter was a Rolland Portable. He was given also its probable service in terms of hard wear and the minutest peculiarities of its type. Another reporter had in the meantime been sent to Scotland Yard to receive any statement and make a preliminary write-up.

When in the conference room at midday the "Marius" letter came up in due course, there was no discussion. The Editor had decided to publish and no injunction had arrived. The Picture Editor was instructed to prepare a full-sized facsimile for the back page. On the general news page would be envelope and splash headlines. The circulation Manager arranged to bill Hampstead, the district where the letter was posted, and the contents of these splash bills was decided on. The Leader Page Editor was also sounded as to a literary write-up.

Much about the same kind of thing was of course being done as a matter of pure routine in the offices of those other London dailies which had received the "Marius" letter. If the *Daily Record* be instanced particularly it is only because it is a sort of medium between the austere white of the aristocratic and the proverbially yellow of the sensational press; a kind of champagne or biscuit as it were.

THE MARIUS LETTERS

By five o'clock, the hour of the Chief's conference, Petershad most of the information he needed. Lawrie had produced a chatty article on the sensational letters of fiction. The Scotland Yard write-up was also ready. As to the letter itself, the policy was to be non-committal with a bias on the hoax side.

And so at 8.50, perfectly normal and may I say, normally perfect, the wheels went round. One by one the presses started until the hum became a deafening roar and speech a thing of signs. The operatives snatching papers from the waterfall were not concerned however with the "Marius" letter; they were merely watching ink. The long line of tenders left the garages and drew up at the shutes. And so on and on and on. The outside noises rose, ebbed and except for an occasional horn, died away into the early hours of morning. The lights went out one by one and the last operatives left.

But in another hour or two the public would awake to find a new sensation and Gossip, whether of clubs, suburban trains or backyard fences, have considerable cause for thankfulness.

(B)

When following as usual the day's routine, the secretary of the Chief Commissioner of Police went through the correspondence and arrived in due course at the "Marius" letter, he was mildly speculative and the least bit intrigued but no more. He could remember roughly the contents of half a dozen similar letters addressed to the Commis-

THE PERFECT MURDER CASE

sioner during the last year or so, though none so verbose and dramatic and none with so direct a challenge. Before he had got half-way through it he had concluded that he held in his hand the beginnings of yet another public and hilarious hoax. Still, there had better be a copy.

He dictated the letter to a typist. Ten minutes later the original, in company with all other correspondence relating to the Criminal Investigation Department was on the desk of Chief-Constable Scott. And five minutes later when McKay of the Newspaper Proprietors' Association rang up, the secretary was decidedly pleased he had treated the letter with sufficient seriousness as to take a copy.

When Sir George Coburn came across this copy he was rather annoyed. Anonymous letters received at New Scotland Yard are a kind of auriferous seam; liable to peter out at any moment after much trouble, liable to show flagrant signs of salting, and liable yet again to give results of first class importance. Then the telephone bell rang and he took up the receiver. A minute later he rang up Chief-Constable Scott.

"Of course you've seen this, Scott?" he said, passing over the copy. "Would you mind telling me what you make of it. I'll be back in a minute, by the way."

But when he returned it was twenty minutes later and one might have guessed that it was business relating to the letter and matters not unconnected with the Home Office that had kept him.

"I'm awfully sorry, Scott, keeping you like this. Now then, what do you make of it?"

Scott, notorious for speaking his mind without

fear or favour once he had determined on a course of action, was inclined to be ironical. "Well, Sir George; I don't see it matters who wrote it. As far as we're concerned it's got to be as genuine as holy writ."

"As a matter of fact," and Sir George made the statement somewhat in the manner of Sir Oracle, "I thought perhaps you'd like to know that everybody seems to think there's something in it. The press will probably publish—for to-morrow—and I should imagine without committing themselves very far. And talking of that, you've heard the story of the chap who holed the putt?"

Scott had—many times—but he knew he would hear it again; and he did.

"I forget which of the professionals it was; missed a putt no longer than this. Chap who was watching knocked one the same length into the hole with the handle of an umbrella. "All very well for you sir," says the pro., "but I can't afford to miss 'em. I have to get my living at it."

"That's true enough sir," said Scott who knew from experience the story's application. "The papers can print any cock-and-bull story they like and even make fools of themselves into the bargain but it's our living and we can't afford to make mistakes. But between ourselves Sir George," and his voice instinctively became confidential, "I think the whole thing's a hoax."

The other also knew the value of being non-committal. "Perhaps you are right. Would you mind telling me, by the way, what you've done with it?"

"We've gone over it for prints, though that

doesn't help much. Also a man's gone to Hampstead to pick up details of posting and collecting and Marshall's doing the typewriter investigation. I don't know if there's anything else you've thought of, Sir George?"

"I don't think there is. Of course you're sending a confidential circular to all divisions concerned." He made a gesture of irritation. "These letters are the very devil. As you say, it's got to be treated as if it were genuine and neither hoax or bluff. But what guarantee is there that a single word in it is reliable enough to justify the enormous amount of work entailed?"

Scott ran his eye over the letter. "I think I shall gamble on whether the other letters which this one mentions do really arrive."

"You mean that if a further letter distinctly limits the area to say, Hampstead or Highbury, and mentions any thing like a definite time, then you can make more detailed arrangements?"

"That's it. Meanwhile all divisions can be warned and Hampstead in particular. I thought I'd see Gowing myself."

And after all, what else could be done? The inhabitants of North London could not very well be segregated nor could each citizen be provided with a custodian for whose bona fides the police could vouch. As far as the press were concerned therefore, Scotland Yard had received the letter but had no statement to make. Nevertheless within a very few hours all the divisions concerned possessed a copy of the letter with an enlarged record of the peculiarities of type, spacing and alignment. Thanks to a lucky hit and the dropping of a letter

face downwards on the damp of the pavement, the authorities knew the postman who had collected the series and the box into which they had been put. That pillar-box had since been under observation as had every other box and office in the Hampstead district.

So much then for the first letter and its reception.

(c)

That this letter was England's principal topic of conversation during the two days that followed is a fairly obvious thing to say. Five only of the big dailies gave facsimiles of the letter and two only accompanied it by more than the barest necessary explanation. But you can imagine what happened. What one's paper did not dare to suggest was supplied by the demands which conversation made. Wherever people were gathered together the utterer of the most plausible theory was listened to with the most respect. Those who had no theories resorted to hint and innuendo until they could, in a securer place among a new audience, repeat as their own the theory of the other fellow.

If one judges from the innumerable letters received by the press from its readers and from the trend of that gossip with which one came into immediate contact, it was clear that three schools of theory survived the mass of surmise and circumlocution. The most popular was that the whole business was a hoax; grisly, in bad taste, what you will, but a hoax for all that. It was admitted that it might go on even to the last second. An ostensible murder might be committed but still as part of an

elaborate and carefully planned spoof. Only when the victim was found to be very much alive would the public realise that it had been sold a particularly mangy pup.

Then came the "madman" party. How could the letter, so they argued, be the work of a normal person? Clearly it was the result of homicidal tendencies and a superiority complex that had run wild. As a hoax it would be only too apparent and the writer was clearly too much in earnest for that. Here was another Nero and some Rome or other had to burn as a background. Another variation of this theory was expressed in a letter sent by a famous sportsman to the press. "Take," said he, "a cricketer of world reputation and put him in a domestic or financial hole from which there is no escape save by a necessary murder. This then is the kind of letter he would write with its sporting chance for the law and easing the pangs of conscience."

Then there were those who took the letter strictly at its face value, as the work of a man who intended to do a terrible deed and escape its consequences. Its adherents were to be found among the lowest of the lowbrows and the highest of the high. The former took the affair to heart and made it, as they always do with the world's scandal, a thing personal and provocative. Those of the latter who decided that to mention it was a thing which might be done, deplored the letter's extravagance and looked up Freud.

Then came the morning of the 10th of October and the arrival of the second letter. This time eight papers printed it in facsimile. The same typewriter

had been used and the postal district was Holborn.

Oct. 9th, 193—.

Dear Sir,

I much regret the bother my letter has caused. To be perfectly candid I hardly expected publication for an epistle so flamboyant. It has however had one effect, if only a humorous one, to make notoriety no longer the peculiar perquisite of Park Lane.

Certain plans have now been completed and the Perfect Murder will take place on the night of the 11th and in the district known as the "O" Division of Police. I think I owe it to the general public to make these disclosures. One cannot stop morbid curiosity but the legitimate nervousness of the innocent is a different matter.

Within a minute or two of the murder Scotland Yard will be informed. In order that there may be no opportunity for the practical joker to cause trouble I am sending to-morrow morning to those concerned a special communication giving the method of telephoning. Further, the public will then be aware that the Perfect Murder has then been committed.

Now if you will pardon me one last word. The murder is necessary, of that I am more than ever convinced. I should however never cease to reproach myself if I gave a moment's further uneasiness to any member of the public. Women and children particularly need not be frightened because the matter will in no way concern them.

Finally, if after the event I feel that I have given the law its chance and have eased in any

THE PERFECT MURDER CASE

way the reproaches of my own conscience, these letters will not have been written in vain.

I have the honour to be,

Yours etc.,

MARIUS.

This added to the excitement with a vengeance. England suffered from an orgy of speculation. Maintainers of theories almost came to blows. Jokes were made at the shows and music halls. Flapperdom arranged murder parties at the hotels. The Ragamuffin Club had a special dance gala and a gallows scene was painted for it by Rubenson. Hawkers sold maps of the "O" Division. The medical students organised a gigantic rag. An enormous fortune must have been laid in bets. Though the cinemas prepared for enormous crowds it seemed as if the general public had made up its mind that the affair was merely a glorious hoax and therefore an excuse for a little temporary excitement. It seemed in fact that what Marius had intended to be the sublime was likely to become the gorbliney.

The morning of the 11th brought, as far as the public was concerned, no further announcements. Scotland Yard still had nothing to report or at least it reported nothing. Nevertheless the final "Marius" letter had arrived as promised.

In accordance with my last letter herewith information. First, to test the genuineness of this communication compare the word "thesis" for peculiarities of type.

The murder will be committed in the "O" Division of Police and in the Postal District

THE MARIUS LETTERS

known as N.22, this night of October the 11th. As soon as is reasonably safe Scotland Yard or an Exchange will be rung up and the formula used will be, "A murder has been committed." At the same time information will be given as to the address of the murdered person, unless that person should happen to be a subscriber, when it will be unnecessary.

Yours, etc.,
MARIUS.

This time the place of posting was Charing Cross. Immediately on its receipt the following precautions were taken.

The superintendent of "O" Division and Detective-Inspector Eaton had a long conference with Chief-Constable Scott and Superintendent Wharton at the Yard. A fast motor tender of the Flying-Squad was to be in readiness at Woodmore Hill Police Station. Details of liaison by telephone from the Yard were worked out. Given reasonable luck and provided always that the exact place of the murder were mentioned in the promised telephone message, the actual scene should have a cordon round it in a very few minutes. And though the chances of catching the murderer within such a net would be infinitely remote, yet the authorities would at least be on the scene far sooner than the public could imagine possible and the scent, what there was of it, be hot.

Such in barest outline was the situation on the afternoon of the 11th as far as it affected Scotland Yard and the public in general. There remains to mention, and very briefly, Durangos Limited.

CHAPTER III

DURANGOS DECIDE TO SIT IN

THOSE who called Sir Francis Weston a lucky man were in little danger of being contradicted. It is true that when he founded Durangos Limited he had behind him an immense private fortune, but after all that may be an aid to success and yet no guarantee of it. Nevertheless in only ten years and from the smallest of beginnings the firm of which he was the head had become expert consulting and publicity agents for the world in general, with Durango House, its colossal skyscraper of a headquarters in London and its branches in every city of note.

He had been lucky too in the heads he had obtained for the great departments, since you may offer what salary you will and find no man good enough for it. Take for instance Ludovic Travers, his financial expert; head if you like, of the Durango Exchequer. After an exceptionally brilliant career at Cambridge he had written that perfectly amazing *Economics of a Spendthrift*, a work not only stupendous in its erudition but from the charm of its style a delight in itself. Then had come *World Markets*, now a textbook in the schools, and finally with *The Stockbroker's Breviary* a return to the whimsical style of his best known work. The luck of Durangos consisted in the acquisition since Travers, supposed generally

to be a dilettante with economics as a passionate and private hobby, had no need to put his nose to the grindstone; his fortune being a considerable one and his royalties a large additional income.

But in nothing was the luck of Francis Weston more exemplified than in the case of the Perfect Murder. The situation was like this. The Cinderella of the Durango departments was undoubtedly that known as the Enquiry Agency, a bureau which undertook genealogical research, finding of missing relatives and much the same kind of work that is done by the better class detective agencies. For some time Sir Francis had had in mind a complete overhaul of this department and the forming from it as nucleus of a wholly new section of Durangos Limited which, while in no way comparable with Scotland Yard, should yet be able to take up any kind of investigation for private clients.

But two things were necessary. For this new department there would have to be found a head who was not only competent but so known to the general public that his name would give an immediate cachet. Once that was settled all that was needed would be some measure of success in a case in which the country as a whole was interested. Such success would be an advertisement uniquely direct and place the department definitely on the map. The trouble was, where were both to come from? Then, at the exact moment chance took a hand. There came to his ears certain information that led him to believe that at least one difficulty could be solved.

John Franklin, after some really distinguished service in the Intelligence Department during the

war, found himself at a loose end. Having experienced a few months of unemployment and then of uncongenial work he decided to do what he should have done before, enter the Police Force; a service which at that time offered exceptional prospects to men of character and undoubted ability.

These he certainly possessed. Add the influence that he had behind him, and a likeable and level-headed personality wherewith to counter the jealousy this might create among his colleagues, and you will admit that his rapid rise in seniority was not unmerited. Five years after his period of routine work he was a detective sergeant. Then came his chance with the Murder in the Waiting Room, a classic that now ranks with the Mahon and Crippen Cases. He would be the first to acknowledge the luck that came his way; the cards as he said, fell for him as if they had been stacked. Be that as it may he was thereafter regarded as one of the coming men in the service.

Some twelve months before this October of 193— however, Detective-Inspector Franklin was recognised one night by a plain clothes officer behaving in such a way that something had to be wrong. When the pair of them got to the nearest police station Franklin did not know even his own name. That nervous breakdown cost him twelve months' sick leave and he was just due for medical examination when Sir Francis Weston became aware of the facts. The offer he made—complete control of the new department—and the salary proposed demanded consideration. Then Franklin decided as Weston hoped he would. His resignation was sent in and already he had been at work some

days on the affairs of the new department, and its reorganisation.

Then the gods tossed another favour into Durangos' lap—the "Marius" letter. Immediately upon its publication Weston had felt a hunch that there was something in it. The preliminary steps he had taken however were somewhat unusual. He had called a special conference and after explanation and apology had asked, on the plea that each was representative of a different aspect of public life, for the considered opinion of each of the departmental heads present as to the genuineness of the letter.

The discussion, human and indeed rather acrimonious, that took place does not matter but when the voting came two only—Franklin himself and Ludovic Travers—were found to have taken the letter at its face value. Sir Francis expressed no opinion. As a matter of fact, however, he left the conference room more than ever of the mind that the writer of the letter was a most unpleasant individual who was perfectly serious in the garish attitude he had chosen to adopt.

The morning of the publication of the second letter found him two hours early at the office where Franklin was hurriedly summoned. Sir Francis had been in fact decidedly uneasy. Like so many of us who put our trust in hunches, whether for Derby winners or five spades, he was beginning to wonder if the other fellow's hunch ought not to be taken into account. If the letters were genuine the world would be waiting to see what happened. If Durangos could prove that the murder was far from being a perfect one, the world was thence-

forth their oyster. But was it genuine, all this palaver about committing murder? That was the question that had occupied the best part of an hour and by now had been more or less settled.

He swivelled the chair round and with a twinkle in his eye surveyed the clock. "Well, we may be a couple of fools, Franklin, but we'll have an awful lot of fools on our side. And what's your opinion of our chances?"

"We've a good sporting one sir; we can't hope for more."

"Hm!" grunted the other and rubbed his chin. "That's true enough. Now let's leave all the theories and keep to the supposition that the murder has actually been committed. What about that Scotland Yard monopoly I was mentioning just now?"

As Franklin looked down at the notes he had been making preparatory to stating a case, you could not fail to be struck by the quiet earnestness, the keenness of the man. He at any rate had no fears about diving into an unknown pool. There was about him too, much that was attractive; the dark, almost foreign-looking face with its deep brown eyes, the trim set of the grey suit and the note of colour lent by the regimental tie, the absence of professional mannerisms; everything made one think of anything but a detective, and of Scotland Yard at that.

"I think Sir Francis,"—the voice was an extraordinarily pleasant one—"we might consider that their monopoly lies only in such things as fingerprints, photographs and the right to enter or interview. I know that seems a lot but if either Chief-Constable Scott or Superintendent Wharton

has the handling of the case I think I might be able to get facilities, at any rate for knowing what the Yard were doing."

There was about the statement however a hesitancy which the other could not fail to notice. He decided to open some of his reserve artillery.

"I expect you will imagine I am not without some influence there. I think we can guarantee that part of the problem—I mean the granting of facilities—if it's going to be of any help."

Franklin looked up suddenly at that. "What you've just said, Sir Francis, is rather curious because I was just going to add that if this letter is absolutely genuine in every line, this isn't going to be the usual kind of Scotland Yard case. What I mean exactly is this. If this fellow—call him Marius for convenience—is definitely out for a perfect murder, there should be no clues in the generally accepted sense of the term; no traces of him or clues of the finger-print nature and no possibility of witnesses. The only real clue should be the one of motive; the fact that Marius says he's *got* to commit the murder, and even there everybody is at the mercy of the letter. After all even that may be merely a deliberate bluff."

"You mean that Scotland Yard may be as much in the dark as we are?"

"Perhaps even more so. I know it sounds unnecessarily quixotic to say so because in a way it leaves no excuse for failure, but as far as this case is concerned the Yard and ourselves start level. Our chances may even be better than theirs because we shan't run any risk of trying to work out an unusual case along stereotyped lines."

"I quite agree with you there. But just one other point. I admit that the understanding was a verbal and implied one that your name should not appear publicly with Durangos until we were in a position to regard the new department as ready to operate. Now tell me frankly. Are your former colleagues aware of your new association or do they simply imagine you resigned purely for reasons of health?"

There was the suggestion of a smile on the detective's face. "Where the Yard is concerned Sir Francis, it's hard to say what is known and what isn't. As far as I'm concerned of course, I've told nobody."

"Well now; what I'm driving at is this. Supposing arrangements could be made for you to be on the spot soon after the murder is committed. Would you feel uncomfortable, under false pretences so to speak, if your former colleagues gave you a welcome, imagining of course that you were a freelance? In other words, am I to keep what influence I've got as a last reserve or could you achieve practically the same results off your own bat?"

Franklin's reply came with unexpected rapidity. "I take it you want me to speak frankly, Sir Francis?"

"Most decidedly!"

"I'd rather not, sir. I should feel more than uncomfortable all the time and once I had to own up the results might be very serious as far as concerned any chance of future help."

The other nodded. "Well, I oughtn't to say so but I'm rather glad you feel like that about it. But

tell me. On what lines would you propose to work, supposing we did take a hand?"

"I hardly know," was the reply. "There ought to be the lines of inquiry that become more or less public property through the Press; I mean names of relatives if there are any or friends of the murdered person. Not only that but if I should happen to have a stroke of luck and pick up something the Yard doesn't know, there might be the chance of exchanging what they want for something *I* want."

"True enough. Exchange is no robbery." Then he fired the question point blank. "Well, it's up to you. Shall we sit in or shall we not? Mind you, I know you'll put up a real good show but all the same I'd rather we left it alone than fail, that is if it becomes generally known that we're interested."

Franklin's face coloured slightly. "I think we ought to sit in, Sir Francis."

He was about to add something, but the other rose and stretched his arms. "Splendid! I'm glad that's settled. Now come along and have some breakfast." He paused to make an entry in the big engagement book. "We'll arrange the rest at 3.0 this afternoon. I shall probably have all sorts of news by then."

There however the matter was left and all that Franklin had to do, in the company of some millions of his interested fellow-countrymen, was to wait and see if the "Marius" letters would, as the minority expected, prove to be absolutely genuine.

CHAPTER IV

THE NIGHT OF THE 11TH OF OCTOBER

(A)

WHEN Detective-Inspector Eaton of the "O" Division arrived at the Police Station, Woodmore Hill, that evening he was accompanied, not by Superintendent Gowing but by that officer's next in seniority, Inspector Veer. The Superintendent it appeared, had had one of his sudden attacks of malaria just after the earlier visit of the afternoon, and at short notice Veer had been put in possession of the facts.

There had also drawn into the station yard a fast motor tender of the Flying-Squad, ready to move off again at a second's notice. Before the station itself the car which had brought the divisional officers remained standing; its driver had however been changed for a man who knew every detail of the district. The night was a mournful one, cold and with drizzly rain which occasionally freshened to showers.

In the office of Inspector Orwell was a cheerful fire. On the table was spread a large-scale map of the district and with the local inspector as mentor the two others got a grip of their bearings from the position they then occupied.

"You know the district pretty well I suppose," said Eaton.

"Fairly, considering I've only been here three months," replied Orwell.

"Any roads up?"

"Not now. The Council were starting to-day on Wilson Avenue," and he indicated the spot, "but I got them to put it off till to-morrow."

"Doctor all right?"

"Yes. He'll be warned automatically as soon as we go, if anything happens."

They drew their chairs up to the fire. After all there was nothing to do except wait, and even if there were a call it might not come before midnight. Somewhere about ten was the time Orwell hazarded as a guess.

"What about Northern Exchange?" he asked. "Any chance of a direct call here? It might make all the difference."

"Nothing's been done that I know of," replied Veer. "For one thing," and he took out a sheaf of papers, "here's the last information received by the Yard," and he held out a copy of the third "Marius" letter. Orwell read it carefully and passed it back.

"As far as we know," said Veer, "this chap may have a confederate. All he's got to do is give a message, apparently harmless, but which contains a key word and the confederate then gives the message of the letter to the Yard or the Exchange. That's why, or I imagine one of the reasons why the Yard will call us direct."

"'Reasonably safe' might mean anything," observed Eaton. "The murderer's only to hop on a bus or tram or take a train and be miles away in very few minutes. I'm open to lay threes against

the local exchange having anything to do with it."

"Not only that," said Veer, "but there's no definite statement that the murdered person is a subscriber. In any case it's my opinion, gentlemen, that theorising before the event isn't going to get us very far."

"There is one good thing," said Eaton, "and that's that nobody knows a word about the area being limited to the postal district. We shan't be troubled by reporters and a crowd. It's a filthy night too; that'll make the roads clear."

But all the same, in spite of Veer's remarks about theorising, the conversation went on, about it and about. The case was discussed from all angles and even its improbabilities were not overlooked. But when each had given his personal opinion they retreated collectively behind the rampart of duty; in fact, there they were and there they had to be, ready for eventualities. If nobody were murdered after all, so much the better for at least one person.

Yet all this time there was a strangeness in the air; something in the conversation itself that made for restraint. They were like men who only partly sleep because they must hear a vital alarm. It was the waiting for the telephone, the sudden call, that made speech unreal and disjointed. Still, a blue haze from the pipes settled over the room and from outside the voices must have sounded one long, steady murmur. Then at 7.37 by the round-dialed clock the telephone shrilled sudden and urgent.

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THE NIGHT OF THE 11TH OF OCTOBER

The hour was, and it was most carefully noted, 7.33 p.m. One of the few operators on late duty at Northern Exchange, Miss Bennett sat with her chair at the required angle of ninety degrees to the switchboard, covering with the least visional effort the steady field of view from side to side. In spite of the fact that she had three positions to look after and that the tiny electric lamps were winking all too frequently, she was finding time to ruminate on a certain bit of bad luck concerning meal reliefs, when—Board!

“Number please!”

A man's voice spoke; sharp, authoritative, clear. “That you Exchange? . . . Listen carefully please. Ring New Scotland Yard immediately! A murder has been committed!”

As if to assure him that the message had been received, she repeated, “New Scotland Yard!” Then she connected at once. “You're through!”

At the other end Scotland Yard took off the receiver. “Hallo! . . . Hallo!! . . . Hallo!!! . . . this last very imperative. But no reply. He flashed Exchange. The operator, knowing automatically that a satisfactory connection had to be made, entered circuit and listened.

“Hallo! Scotland Yard speaking. Are you wanting us miss?”

“One moment please. There is someone wanting you.”

By ringing on the line she tried to recall the original subscriber. At the same time she reported the matter to the supervisor, repeating his message and adding the number of the line—Northern 30003. Then while the supervisor traced the name

and address of the subscriber from that number, the operator spoke back to Scotland Yard.

"Are you there? . . . You are wanted by Northern 30003 who said a murder had been committed. I have been unable to ring them as they have left the receiver off. Just a moment please. I'll connect you with the supervisor who is tracing the subscriber's address."

Officially she plugged in on C.P. and rang, and at the answer of the supervisor, "You are through to Scotland Yard," she connected on the same pair of cords. Then unofficially she found time to whisper to the operator on her left, "Murder! Scotland Yard!"

Meanwhile Scotland Yard was listening with every second of importance. "Are you there? . . . The subscriber's name and address are—Richleigh, T. T., 122 The Grove, Woodmore Hill. I'll repeat that," and she did so.

What happened thereafter at Northern Exchange does not concern this story. But no sooner had that name and address been repeated than Scotland Yard rang up Northern 011. The time then, however long the interval has seemed in its relating, was 7.37 p.m.

(B)

Before the bell had rung for two seconds Inspector Veer had the receiver at his ear.

"Veer speaking." There was a pause. The others scarcely breathed and their eyes never left the inspector's face. Then, "Yes sir. Very good sir. Good-bye."

THE NIGHT OF THE IITH OF OCTOBER

He snapped the receiver on the hook and spoke the one phrase, "122 The Grove."

Orwell gave a lightning glance at the map and with his finger marked the spot. Then already the plan which had had its dress-rehearsal earlier that day was in operation. Eaton moved like a streak through the side door to the police tender. He repeated the address to the local officer who acted as driver. The tender passed out of the yard and followed the closed car which was already in motion.

There was not overmuch room for three but between Veer and the driver sat Orwell. The speed of the car was a good fifty in the straight and the corners were taken with gurgling of horns and the scrape of braked wheels. And between the intervals of this, Veer had to get somehow into his head from Orwell's rapid description the situation of the house and plan the immediate disposition of his forces. As far as he could gather the house was a detached one with a large garden backing to the gardens of Maple Terrace with a private alley-way between.

The road itself lay deserted, a residential backwater where even the distant roar of the traffic was unheard. The trees that bordered the pavement masked the light of the lamps but in the wet of the surface the reflections ran streakily. In the quiet, and the chill of the drizzle everything seemed moribund, autumnal, almost eerie. There was not even the footfall of a wayfarer to break the silence; only from the smooth twigs of the plane-trees the streams trickled to the road. Then there was a hurried whispering as the tender drew up.

The ten men became three groups. Two moved up the blackness of the alley-way, the other passed along the road. In a moment or two, save for the cars and the dimmed lights, the street appeared as untenanted as before. And just at that minute there was a larger drop or two and the drizzle became a shower.

In the private way at the back of the gardens two men were posted, one to the east of No. 122, the other to the west. Four others entered the garden by the gate which was latched but unlocked. Keeping in touch with each other and with torch-lights moving steadily they passed through the shrubbery and along the scantily stocked border. At the house they split apart, two to each side and awaited the arrival of two men who had similarly searched the front and side shrubberies. All this was the matter of a minute or two and nothing being reported, Orwell placed two men at each south corner of the house, two inside the carriage way and two out of sight by the pavement. The last man, Sergeant Harrison, was in general charge and maintained liaison.

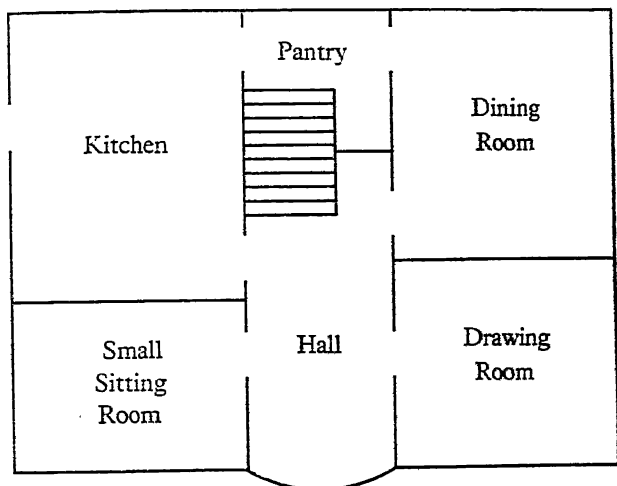
Inspector Veer and Detective-Inspector Eaton had however made straight at the start for the front door of No. 122. Veer rapped smartly on the brass knocker. Above the door a faint light could be seen coming through the semi-circular fanlight but elsewhere the house appeared dark as doom. There was no sound; the inspector rapped again. For half a minute he studied the brass knocker while both of them listened for a movement. It came. Almost before they were aware of it the door opened and the figure of a maid showed

THE NIGHT OF THE IITH OF OCTOBER

plainly. But her actions were extraordinary. Her eyes opened staringly, her mouth went agape and if ever there were terror depicted on a woman's face, there it was. She raised a hand nervously, spoke a word that was unintelligible but which might have been, "Don't!" with vowel long and shuddering, and then collapsed at their feet in a dead faint.

The inspector stooped and picked her up; a burden light enough. "Put the door to Eaton, but don't let the catch work." He moved forward to where on the left a half-opened door showed itself. He entered with his burden and hard on his heels Eaton felt for the switch and snapped on the light.

Veer grunted. "Some sort of a sitting-room. Find Orwell if you can." By the time the unconscious maid was lying on the sofa and he had had a good



look round the room, the two entered. "Stop here

a moment Orwell, will you. You Eaton, come with me and fetch some water. I'll be trying all the rooms. Keep an eye on the hall, Orwell."

They went out quickly to the hall, rectangular, spacious and with the red of the pendant giving an effect at once obscure and diffused. Three doors were plainly to be seen.

"Probably the kitchen," said Veer, making for the far left and his guess was correct. And while Eaton got the cup of water and returned to the sitting-room he made a survey. To what must have been the outside was a door with key in lock. Almost opposite was another door. "To the dining-room for a fiver," was his conclusion as he tried the knob. But the door was fastened and from the far side at that.

He doubled for the hall, almost colliding with Eaton.

"Stand fast here Eaton!" and he indicated the foot of the stairs which ran back to a top landing. While the detective watched, wondering what the scheme really was, he tried the first door to the right of the entrance. It opened and the light revealed a drawing room; knickknacks, greenery, chairs in loose covers, yellow piano and burr walnut table. But the room smelt musty and there was no sign of murder.

There remained the fourth door leading apparently to the room which he had supposed to be the dining-room. He turned the handle but again the door was locked and on the inside. At that moment too Orwell came out of the sitting-room. "She's coming round!"

"Stay at the doors and watch the stairs!" snapped

Veer. "Lend me a hand, Jack!" and he put his shoulder to the door. It was immovable. Eaton drew back a couple of feet and launched thirteen stone of weight but it still held. "Try the kitchen—that door—for a lever!" ordered Veer and in a second or two Eaton was back with a hammer and an ironing board.

A minute of desperate smashing and the room was visible. Veer stepped first through the ruined door, fumbled for the light and switched it on. From the sitting-room came the sound of moaning and a voice. At the same time steps were heard outside; the front door opened and a doctor entered.

"Just got your message," he began breezily to the back of two heads. There was no answer. The room came first.

It had one occupant—a man grey haired and bearded. He lay sprawled back in a leather-covered easy chair, mouth open, arms flopping, eyes staring. On the waistcoat of the suit was a stain, circular in shape and no bigger than a half crown but from its centre protruded the handle of a knife. Of signs of disorder there were none. A cheerful fire burned in the grate before which the chair was drawn. On a pedestal table at its left was a half-filled glass, a decanter and a syphon.

Veer turned round then to the doctor. "Doctor Greenlaw isn't it?" and without waiting for an answer, "See if he's dead, will you?" Then while the doctor got to work he went quickly to the side-board by the smashed door where a telephone receiver stood on the mahogany. Using the wire he hung it on the hook. "Ask Orwell to cover you

to the top landing Eaton, and go through the upper rooms. What's the verdict, doctor?"

"Oh, he's dead all right," replied Greenlaw. "Matter of a few minutes I should judge."

"Hm! Well, sorry to trouble you but this can wait. In the sitting-room there—the light's on—you'll find a girl lying on a sofa. Pull her round as fast as you can. There'll be the devil of a lot depending on what she can tell us."

He took off the receiver, holding it by the cord with finger and thumb and while waiting to be put through to Scotland Yard let his eyes wander round the room. In the far left corner was a door leading to the kitchen. Back of the dead man were two windows and a french window, the former surmounted by mahogany rods from which the curtains hung and the latter covered by a blind. In the lock of the splintered door was no key.

Just as he finished his brief report to the Yard Eaton re-entered. "Two women's bedrooms, one unused spare and one man's. Two others unfurnished. No sign of a soul."

"Good! I'll go and see what I can get out of the maid. You have a look round."

In the hall he motioned Orwell to follow him. Outside the front door stood the sergeant, almost invisible in the darkness. "Looks as if there ought to be a light here," said Veer. He slipped inside again and found the switch which controlled an outside light above the steps. "Better leave it on. It won't be too conspicuous. Now Orwell, have the house watched from the outside while you go over the inner rooms. The bird's probably miles away by this time but it won't do to take any chances."

And leaving the inspector to carry on he made for the left-hand gate of the front drive.

The hour was then 8.0 p.m. and the rain was falling heavily.

(c)

Had you seen the three of them in mufti and in places not connected with their daily bread, this is how you might have placed them. VEER: Tall, wiry, high cheek bones, waxed moustache, alert eyes and the least touch of the supercilious in his manner. "Regimental-Sergeant-Major." ORWELL: Thickset and therefore looking shorter than his height, clean-shaven, high colour, outstanding ears and manner bluffly jovial. "Butcher or Bookmaker." EATON: Of precise regulation height, well-built, friendly eyed, well-cut mouth and quiet bearing. "Probably a bank cashier."

There was in short something about the detective that was certainly not official. What you would not have known was that he was extraordinarily well read and that his hobby was an unusual one—Borroviana. From Eaton therefore one could expect at least an originality of outlook.

As soon as Veer had left the room he got to work. On hands and knees he examined the worn, blue carpet as far as the sideboard on which the receiver had stood. He squinted along the furniture and let the light from his torch play on it. He peered beneath the dead man's chair and then stood erect before the body. The fingers held nothing. He bent quickly and sniffed at the lips. For half a minute he watched the grey, bloodless

face, the drooping, sensual lower lip and the vulpine features which death made even more repulsive. Then he turned to the windows. Across them were drawn repp curtains hanging from massive mahogany poles. Beneath were roller blinds. The windows themselves, of the sash type, were fast and immovable, and behind the glass the heavy hasp of the wooden shutters could be seen. The key of the french window was in the lock and at top and bottom bolts were firmly home. Facing you as you entered the room were two more windows, overlooking the side shrubbery and these had the same curtains and shutters and were equally secure. The door which led to the kitchen was bolted top and bottom. And while he was in the act of trying the stiffness of the bolts, Inspector Veer entered the room with a stranger.

"Can't get a word out of that maid yet. The doctor's still pulling her round. This is Mr. Wrench of No. 124."

He caught the detective's signal of direction. "Now Mr. Wrench; if you'll be so good as to come this way. Would you mind telling us if this is Mr. Richleigh: Mr. T. T. Richleigh?"

Wrench, a man of about fifty and plainly very nervous passed behind the table somewhat awkwardly. One look was enough for him.

"Yes. That's Mr. Richleigh."

"You known him long? Sit down, Mr. Wrench, and make yourself comfortable."

The invitation was rather ironical since Wrench was mopping his forehead with his handkerchief. The inspector repeated his question.

"Yes, er, about seven years."

"Anybody else kept in the house beside the maid?"

"Yes; there should be the housekeeper; Mrs. Carton or Carlton or some name like that."

"Nobody else? The deceased was unmarried?"

"Oh no! I mean I've always been given to understand he was a widower. I believe his wife died a good many years ago."

"Any relatives or family do you know?"

Wrench mopped his head again. "I really don't know. I understood he had some nephews and I've occasionally seen a car outside, but I really don't know."

"You didn't hear anything unusual to-night?"

"I'm afraid I didn't," replied the other, very apologetically. "As a matter of fact I was listening-in from tea till just now when you saw me."

"Everything gone wrong!" exploded Veer when Wrench had been shepherd home by the back way. "What do you make of it?"

"More or less what we expected," replied Eaton. "He left apparently by the front door and took the key with him. I can find nothing and I've been over the place with a small-tooth comb."

Veer grunted, then, "Let's try the pockets."

The body could hardly have been placed more conveniently. The arms were so apart as they hung loosely over the narrowish chair that with no disturbance of its position one could with finger and thumb or a couple of fingers remove the contents of the pockets. The yield was a mixed one—a handkerchief, two shillings, sixpence, two pennies, a bunch of small keys and one Yale, a pencil, a penknife, a white metal watch marked "Chrono-

mètre" on face, a thin packet of papers, a note-case containing fourteen pound notes irregularly numbered, and lastly an envelope.

It was the latter that was first examined. Typed in the centre were the words

Thesis

THE PERFECT MURDER

The eyes of the two met, and fell again. "Helpful sort of chap!" remarked Veer bitterly, then, "Try those keys on that secretaire bookcase. Probably where he keeps his papers. I'll look over these," and he set to work on the papers from the breast pocket of the dead man.

With one exception they were unimportant, consisting as they did of odd scraps of scribbling paper, two receipts for oddments of clothing, an estimate from a local plumber and a series of clippings, questionable pornographic innuendos from some discursive, sporting rag that was accustomed to sail very near the wind. The exception was a typewritten letter, folded in four. From its condition it had been carried about for days and read frequently. In two places the paper had actually cracked and the whole was soiled and fingerstained. The paper was probably that of the hotel mentioned.

Constable Hotel,

Oct. 1st, 193—.

My dear Uncle,

If you think you can get away with it you are welcome to try. If however you think I have

THE NIGHT OF THE 11TH OF OCTOBER

come all the way from South Africa to be made a fool of, you are in for the shock of your life. You have two choices and ten days to choose. Either disgorge and look pleasant or keep your money and take the consequences.

Yours,
T. W. R.

"Anything there?" asked Veer, turning the letter face downwards and going over to where the other was rummaging in drawers and pigeonholes.

"Address of solicitor, addresses of two nephews and partly used cheque book on local bank," replied Eaton, indicating the small pile he had placed on one side. But at that moment there was a double interruption.

The doctor popped in with, "Excuse me inspector but I think she's all right now," and voices were heard in the hall. The police tender had arrived from Scotland Yard. In five minutes the fingerprint experts were at work; photographs and detailed measurements of the room were being taken; the doctor was making out his preliminary report after a conference with the newly arrived Divisional Surgeon, and Chief-Constable Scott, having received a rapid précis of all there was to tell, took up his position with his back to the sitting-room. Behind him he could catch the low voice of Eaton and from time to time he spoke a quiet word or two to a tall figure in thick, travelling coat and bowler hat who stood by his side, hands deep in the coat pockets and eyes peering through hornrimmed spectacles.

The hour was then 8.45. The first tender was

THE PERFECT MURDER CASE

about to return to Camden Town and duty reliefs had already arrived from the local station. A second car had been despatched to The Ridgway, Enfield, to fetch if possible Ernest James Richleigh who appeared to be not only the dead man's legal adviser but also his nephew and the eldest one at that.

CHAPTER V

THE NIGHT OF THE 11TH OF OCTOBER (*contd.*)

(A)

As the doctor left the room he met Eaton at the door and whispered in his ear, "She's all right now but I'd go a bit easy. She's badly scared about something."

That was reasonably clear to the detective as soon as he entered. The girl, her face whiter against the conventional black of her dress, sat bolt upright on the sofa, handkerchief in hand, with a look that was both furtive and defiant. One could have assumed that normally she was fluffily pretty and knew it, but her features were just a bit too sharp, her mouth too thin and calculating. But the detective's manner was perfect bedside; his smile as friendly and reassuring as he could make it.

"Well young lady; feeling better now?"

The reply was unexpected. "Am I going to be taken away?"

Whatever the effect of the revelation the other showed no signs of having heard anything unusual. "I don't think we want to take you away. All we want you to do is to get better and tell us all about it. Take your own time."

Then there was another unexpected develop-

ment. The words came with a rush. "I really didn't mean to do it. I've never done anything wrong before." She put out her hand in appeal, then started to cry and finally blubbered through her tears, "If I own up and tell you everything you won't take me to prison? I didn't mean to do anything wrong when I saw the parcel. . . ."

Eaton was getting out of his depth. "I don't think you need worry about going to prison." He patted her on the shoulder. "There now. Don't worry about anything. There's nothing to cry about."

The sobbing died away into spasmodic hiccoughing and she dabbed her eyes. The answers she gave were not too distinct and the voice was that of a martyr.

"What's your name?"

"Mary. Mary Adams."

"How long have you been here, Mary; I mean in your present post?"

"Only three weeks . . . sir." This last maybe a tribute to the bedside manner.

"Housemaid?"

"House-parlourmaid sir. Mrs. Cardon does the cooking and she's housekeeper."

"Where is she now?"

The voice became more certain. There was even a hardness in it. "It's one of her nights out and she won't be in before ten."

"Now then Mary; tell me everything that happened to-night. Start at the very beginning and don't miss anything out."

She turned her eyes with sudden suspicion on the other's face. Then she looked down. Then she

dabbed her eyes. Apparently she was finding difficulty in starting.

"I took in Mr. Richleigh's tea at five and cleared away at half past. Mrs. Cardon she'd gone out before that and I was all alone in the kitchen because she don't like you having a fire in the sitting-room, where we are, when she ain't there. So I sat in the kitchen where there was a fire and then there was a knock at the door and I saw the parcel . . ."

"Just a minute," interrupted the other. "What time was this knock?"

"About half past seven because I'd just looked at the clock and I thought I'd soon have to be laying his supper. There wasn't any cooking to do because he was having cold ham and cheese. So I went to the door . . ."

"The kitchen door?"

"The kitchen door and when I opened it there wasn't nobody there and then on the ground in front of the door I saw the parcel."

Again the look of pathetic innocence and a hint of more tears. "Yes; go on!" urged Eaton. "Tell me everything that happened."

"Well, I picked up the parcel and read it and it said, 'Mrs. Malone, 129 The Grove,' so I thought there'd been some mistake but I couldn't see or hear nobody so I took the parcel into the kitchen and—and——" and here the tears came in earnest.

"And you thought you'd like to see what was inside it. Well, I might have done the same thing myself."

And so, bit by bit, the story came out. The parcel had been taken up into the bedroom for better

examination and had turned out to be two pairs of silk stockings. Then, according to her story she flew downstairs intending to lay the supper and take the parcel round after. Also while in the bedroom she heard the master cough as if he were moving about. When she got back in the kitchen she was just about to put out the supper things when there came the knock at the front door and when she finally decided to answer it, the shock of seeing the men and the police moving in the background was enough to send her off into a faint.

Now however unsatisfactory the story Eaton accepted its outlines as true. The first discrepancy was seen when the parcel was asked for. Amid more tears the stockings were produced from under an ironing blanket in the dresser drawer. The brown paper and the partially intact label thereon were recovered from the ashpan of the kitchen grate, perforated by dropping cinders but sufficiently whole to prove at least the story of their arrival. Had the fire been clear at the time of their depositing they would have undoubtedly gone into the flames and not where they did.

The next job was a flying visit to Mrs. Malone. She had ordered no stockings and expected none. As a widow of over seventy she would in any case have had no use for the flesh-coloured gaities of the parcel. So much for that then. Chief-Constable Scott received at once an account of this preliminary cross-examination.

"Bring her into the kitchen," said Scott. He made a remark to the man in the travelling coat and the two of them moved off to the kitchen

where in a second or two Eaton and the girl joined them.

Mary Adams speedily realised that the truth and nothing else, unadorned by tears and protestations, was the only safe line. The real reason for the visit of the police was moreover news that left her in precious little mood for further prevarication. By the time Scott had finished with her the following facts seemed definitely established.

- (i) Taking into account all her actions from the time she picked up the parcel to the time when she heard the noise which she described as coughing, not less than four minutes elapsed.
- (ii) After hearing this noise she was actually in the kitchen within half a minute.
- (iii) From start to finish she heard no other noise.

The verbal dressing-down which was administered to the witness was a stiff one. If she got one thing into her fluffy peroxide head at the end of it it was that the prison gates were yawning and martyrdom at a discount. But there was no point in pushing things too far. With a last and tactful injunction to get ready a big pot of tea—Scott and his cups of tea were proverbial—and to be not only thankful for favours received but ready for further examination at any minute, she was left to think things over.

Nor was there time for anything else. Orwell arrived with Mr. Ernest Richleigh who, as the former whispered to his chief at a convenient

moment, had undoubtedly spent the evening at a local cinema with his wife and daughter. Eaton returned to the dining-room; Orwell kept an eye on Adams and things in general. The newcomer, with the two officers and the stranger adjourned, after further identification of the body, to the drawing-room where the gas-fire was lit. The time was then 9.30.

(B)

Ernest Richleigh, senior partner in the legal firm of James, Richleigh and James, was far from being a conventional type. He was short, sturdy, fiery hued and, in spite of a certain ability to freeze up at a second's notice, naturally breezy and cheerful. That night however he was unnatural in the sense that he could hardly enliven the proceedings with his usual stock-in-trade of humour. One felt that in keeping so lugubrious a countenance he was undergoing an unwonted strain. He did unloose one flippancy which had stood him well on many a sad occasion but it fell flat on the cold, official air.

"This is a sad business for you Mr. Richleigh," Scott had said.

"Well, we've all got to die; even you and I," returned Richleigh.

Scott waved his hand to a chair. "Sit down, Mr. Richleigh, and let's see what we can make of this terrible affair." He held up to the light the card of the visitor and read it again. "I take it you want to help us all you can?"

"Oh certainly! Most certainly!"

"When did you last see your uncle alive?"

Richleigh frowned as in thought. "A week ago to-night."

"Business visit, courtesy or pleasure? What would you say?"

"Oh business. Strictly business. As a matter of fact my uncle hinted at the possibility of his marriage and wished to discuss the drawing up of a will."

"A new will?"

"Oh no! As far as I am aware my uncle made no will. I had advised him from time to time that it was his duty to indicate his wishes as to the disposal of his estate and that it was my duty so to advise him."

"You are prepared to tell us who the heirs are; I mean if the deceased actually died intestate as you suggest?"

Richleigh met this with a circumlocution. "The only surviving relatives are my three brothers and myself, nephews of the deceased."

"Would you mind giving me the names and addresses of those nephews?" asked Scott and Veer prepared to write down the statements.

"Hm! Let me see," and he took from his pocket what one felt to be a wholly unnecessary pair of pince-nez and having adjusted them, consulted a packet of miscellaneous papers and a small diary book which he placed on the table.

"Mr. H. Richleigh, c/o Rupert Pyne Theatrical Co., 75 Georgia St., W.C.I."

"Your brother is an actor on tour?" suggested Scott.

"That is so. Poor fellow, he, er, still, that's neither here nor there. 'The Rev. C. Richleigh,

Little Martens, Suffolk.' " He waited till that was down then passed across a paper. "This letter is from my brother, Frank, the youngest of us, at present on tour in France."

Oct. 9th, 193—.

Dear Ernest,

So sorry to be a nuisance to you already but I left behind me two new brushes. You'll find them in the unlocked bag I left in the spare room. Can't get the same kind here so will you send them on to me Poste Restante, Quillan, Aude, France.

Weather pretty decent. Many thanks. In great haste,

FRANK.

"What is he, this brother?" asked Scott as Veer passed the letter back. "An artist or another actor."

"Neither. He's a schoolmaster; on special leave of absence. A grace term I believe they call it."

"Did your brothers know about this proposed will?"

"I may have mentioned it to them. I probably did. There was no reason why I should not."

"None whatever. Now Mr. Richleigh, you have no other cousins? In other words your uncle had no other nephews?"

"None whatever."

"Quite certain? No connection with South Africa for instance?"

The lawyer cast a sharp look over the top of his glasses.

"Most of the estate of the deceased came to him at the death of his brother, my uncle, Mr. Peter

Richleigh of Cape Town. The deceased, Mr. Peter Richleigh and my father were the only three children of my grandfather. Mr. Peter Richleigh actually died in this house and was unmarried."

"Deceased was comfortably off?"

"Very! Between ourselves his income was over £2,000 a year."

Scott showed polite, but inwardly very real surprise. "One wouldn't have guessed it. But with regard to the question of heirs and also entirely between ourselves, what do you make of this?" And he handed over the Constable Hotel letter.

The question was a poser, at least the lawyer could make nothing of it. But he made one admission. "Of course Mr. Peter Richleigh may have been married secretly. It's most improbable and further than that I'm not prepared to go. I do take it, however, that this supposed nephew can be got hold of at the address he gives?"

"Don't worry about that," retorted Scott grimly. "There's a chap sitting in the manager's office at this moment. But one other thing Mr. Richleigh. Do you know the lady your uncle was proposing to marry?"

The reply came with peculiar emphasis. "A Mrs. Cardon; his housekeeper!"

"Hm! By the way, we're expecting her at any minute. You any objection to seeing her?"

"I'd rather not," was the hasty reply. And though the lawyer must have had some exquisite reason for the objection he did not even trouble to give reason good enough.

"Just one other thing. Is there anybody who, to

your knowledge, might have done this deplorable deed? Any enemies of the deceased?"

"I might name a good few," replied the other with obvious satisfaction, "but unless you're prepared for an hour's conference it's not much use beginning."

"You mean the deceased was not exactly popular?"

The lawyer closed up as suddenly as he had opened. "Perhaps I've hinted at more than I care at present to substantiate. But you can take it that the deceased was a hard man: in many ways a much hated man. More I would rather not say."

"You realise the importance of the question?" said Scott soberly, looking at his man with an expression of singular earnestness. But the other held his ground.

"I most certainly do. He quarrelled with everybody. If there was a trick to be won or an advantage to be gained, he won it at any cost. A Mr. Steward who used to come here and play cribbage refused to enter the house again because he wouldn't put up with cheating at tuppence an end. He couldn't keep servants, the tradesmen detested him and he hadn't a genuine friend in the world. That's a plain statement except in so far as it errs on the side of sympathy. After all," he added with an irony that masked a growing anger, "we're enjoined to speak well of the dead."

"A final afterthought," said Scott. "Nothing unusual about the deceased last week? No signs of panic? No expressed or hinted wish for confession?"

"None whatever," was the instant reply.

There was a tap on the door and Orwell entered. "Mrs. Cardon is here sir. She's in the sitting-room at the moment."

"Very good," said Scott. "We'll be there in a moment. Now Mr. Richleigh; we're most grateful to you for what you've done. There's nothing else you can think of at the moment? Nothing you want to ask?"

The lawyer shook his head. He removed the glasses and put them slowly and carefully back into his pocket. "I'm sorry for the notoriety. I'm sorry for everything but I've felt for some time that things couldn't go on." He rose from the chair and shook his head again. "A bad business! Of course if there's anything I can do. . . ."

"We know where to find you," completed Scott as the two passed out into the hall.

Inspector Veer cast a glance at the stranger who in a seat by the window had watched the scene so quietly that his presence had been forgotten. The two caught each other's eyes.

"A pretty shrewd customer that!" remarked the inspector with a jerk of his head to indicate the departed lawyer.

Ludovic Travers gave a look that was meant to be inscrutable and ventured an assentient, "Very! Very!" After all, when among the detectives it is as well for the inexperienced to be mysterious.

(c)

When the four of them arrived in the sitting-room they found Detective-Inspector Eaton and the housekeeper already there. The former had been explaining the situation but if he had expected

tears he found none. One might have looked for an expression of regret, of sorrow at the untimely end of a fellow being, whatever had been the frailties or vices that were part of his humanity.

The housekeeper was a massive woman, well above the average height; of ample bust and blowzy; a typical barmaid without the good humour of the type. She looked coarse, defiant, sullen; a woman with a grievance. Eaton's courtesy had passed her by as the idle wind and as she sat there one might have imagined a cat, steady eyed, tail a-swish and claws that could scar.

In front of her Scott took the limelight. The others faded into the background.

"Now Mrs. Cardon. It is Mrs. Cardon, isn't it?"

"That's my name."

"We're very glad you've come so opportunely to help us. This must have been a great shock to you?"

There was no reply. She just watched steadily. Whoever made the first slip it would not be Rose Cardon.

Scott moralised a bit. "Death, at any rate by violence, is always a shock. You're a widow, Mrs. Cardon?"

"Why are you questioning me? What are these men doing here?"

"These men are here as I am; in the interests of justice. I am questioning you because at this moment you are the head of this house. From what you can tell us we may discover who killed Thomas Richleigh. You are here to help the law and us. Don't you want to do that?"

"Very well."

THE NIGHT OF THE 11TH OF OCTOBER (*contd.*)

"You are a widow?"

"My husband died fourteen years ago."

Scott tried a little finesse. "Then if you'll excuse my saying so, you must have married very young." But not a muscle of her face moved.

"How long have you been with Mr. Richleigh as his housekeeper?"

"Eight years come Easter."

"You found him a good master?"

"I did."

"He confided in you perhaps. Told you things he would not have told anybody else?"

"Perhaps he did."

"Then did you notice anything in his conduct recently or did he tell you anything which might lead you to suspect that he was in fear of being murdered?"

"He didn't say anything to me."

"There was nothing peculiar about the conduct of the deceased when you left him this afternoon?"

"Not that I noticed."

"Have you heard him speak of a nephew in South Africa?"

She shook her head.

"No such visitor has ever come to the door and asked to see Mr. Richleigh?"

"Not that I know of."

"Now think carefully, Mrs. Cardon. Is there anybody who in your opinion bore such a grudge or enmity against your late employer as to threaten murder or vengeance at any time?"

"Not openly. He ordered a Mr. Steward out of the house once when they had a few words but that was nothing."

"Why did you say 'not openly'? Do you mean there might be secret enemies?"

Now things began to show themselves. The amount of concentrated venom in the answer was a revelation.

"Only those who lost his money."

"You mean for example. . . ."

"His nephews. They'd been after him for years but he did them in the end."

"You mean," and he leaned forward on the table until his face almost touched his hands, "that by your marriage you would have had control of his money?"

"And I have now!" This with triumph.

"Exactly how, may I ask?"

"Mr. Richleigh told me he'd made a will and everything he had would be mine."

"Well, that may be so and it may not. But don't be disappointed, Mrs. Cardon, if it turns out that Mr. Richleigh died without making a will."

That flustered her somewhat and Scott went on. "He told you the name of the solicitor who drew up this will? Or did he draw it up himself?"

She shook her head.

"Now Mrs. Cardon; purely as a matter of form and please don't take offence at the question. You spent the evening out?"

"I did."

"With whom?"

"With Mrs. Clarke, Mr. Steward's housekeeper. We went to the pictures and had some supper afterwards."

"Thank you, Mrs. Cardon. Mr. Steward lives at what number?"

"No. 124."

"Excuse me a second." He made a signal to Veer who left the room; then he whispered to Eaton. Finally he turned to the housekeeper. "I hope to have a cup of tea now, Mrs. Cardon. Will you have one with me?"

"No thank you."

Eaton left the room and after a second or two Scott continued his questioning. "Mr. Richleigh, or should I say yourself, had some trouble in keeping maids."

"That's not uncommon."

"You had bad luck I take it. They were treated well enough?"

"Too well, in my opinion."

"How, may I ask?"

Over her face came an expression half sneering, half impudent. "If you kept one you'd soon find out."

There was a tap on the door and the maid, Mary Adams, came in with a small, brass tray on which was a cup of tea and a sugar basin. Eaton slipped in behind her. From the moment she entered, the eyes of the other woman never left her face and the look was not a pleasant one. And when the maid's eye caught that of her mistress there was in return a look of absolute contempt, a kind of bravado that said, "Your reign's over!"

"Thank you, Mary," said Scott, dropping two lumps into the cup. "You sure you won't have one, Mrs. Cardon? What about you, Mr. Travers? Well, you don't know what's good for you. Now then Mary; you're not afraid to sleep in

the house to-night? Two of us will be here all the time."

"Not if I can shift my bed, sir. I don't want to sleep next to her."

Then there was a scene. "You common slut! So you're the one whose been telling tales. . . ."

"You keep your tongue to yourself, Mrs. Cardon. If I were to open my mouth. . . ."

"You pack your box and get out of the house!"

"Not even respectable you aren't. I've seen your goings on you dirty. . . ."

Then having heard the lie of things Scott asserted himself. "That will do, Adams! You keep your tongue under control or I'll put you where you'll have time to get cool." Then to the other woman, whose bosom was heaving and face flushed almost to purple, "Mrs. Cardon; I may want you again in the morning. If you take my advice you'll go straight to bed."

He got up and held open the door and after a tantalising delay the housekeeper went out, head in air and with a pose that poorly simulated indifference.

Scott turned to the girl. "The key of the dining-room; where was it kept?"

"In the lock sir."

"Inside or out?"

"Sometimes in and sometimes out sir."

"Hm! Well tell me all about it."

"When Mrs. Cardon was out late sir, the master used to go to bed early and he always used to lock the door on the outside so that if burglars got into the dining-room they couldn't get out. Then when I got up in the morning I used to unlock it so as

THE NIGHT OF THE 11TH OF OCTOBER (*contd.*)

to get in and then I always had to put the key inside so if he didn't want to be disturbed he could lock himself in——and her too."

"What exactly do you mean by that?"

"They used to be in there together in——"

"I don't want to hear that, thank you. Keep to what I'm asking. The pantry; was that locked to-night?"

"Not that I know of sir."

"And the key of the front door; who had that?"

"Mrs. Cardon had one, sir, because she used to let herself in."

"And did you ever have the key in your hands?"

"Oh no sir!"

"How did you unlock the door then?"

"It went with a chain, sir, and bolts, and you could undo it from the inside."

"Hm! You answer all bells?"

"Yes sir; except when I'm dressing or Mrs. Cardon happened to be handy."

"Has a stranger called to see Mr. Richleigh during the last week or two, saying he was a nephew from South Africa?"

"A man did call sir. On the Wednesday night, a week ago, it was."

"What happened?"

"He asked to see Mr. Richleigh and I said he was out and he said where was he? So I said he was out on business and as I didn't know when he would be in, would he leave a message? Then he said, very nasty, he'd give him a message he wouldn't forget in a hurry. Then he went off and didn't leave no message."

"And where *was* Mr. Richleigh?"

"Gone out to get his money in sir; least that's what I've always understood. He's got two hair-dresser's shops in Tottenham and it's early closing day and he always goes there then."

"What time did he get in?"

"I don't know sir. I had a headache and Mrs. Cardon she sent me off to bed about nine."

"Of course you told her what happened?"

A pause, then, "She'd just popped out for a minute."

"But you could have told her when she came in?"

A sullen look came into the girl's face. "I don't hold with telling *her* everything. I did mean to tell the master in the morning but I forget all about it."

"What was he like, this man? Could you describe him?"

"Well, I thought first of all he was Mr. Harold—Harold Richleigh—and I couldn't see him very well in the dark and then as soon as he spoke I knew it wasn't him."

Scott seemed on the point of going further into that question, but he changed his mind and made an entry in his notebook. "Now just one other thing. You're quite sure the noise you heard was Mr. Richleigh coughing?"

"Oh yes sir! It was just like Mr. Richleigh was clearing his throat of something. It's a long way from where I was but that's what it sounded like."

"And afterwards you didn't hear the front door click? No further noise of any kind?"

"No sir; least not till the front door was knocked."

Scott finished the cup of tea which must have

THE NIGHT OF THE 11TH OF OCTOBER (*contd.*)

been tepid by this time and remained silent for a good minute. Then he got up. "Now my girl, you go to bed and let's hear no more about wanting to change your room. Tap on Mrs. Cardon's door and say I say she's to put the key of her room outside the door and you do the same with yours."

As she passed out he turned to Travers whose presence one might reasonably have supposed he had forgotten. "Women are the very devil!"

Travers found no comment but nodded sympathetically. Out in the hall Scott's first duty was to post a constable on the landing upon which the bedrooms opened. The keys which were brought to him he pocketed.

The hour was then 10.40 p.m. and the rain was coming down in torrents.

CHAPTER VI

THE NIGHT OF THE 11TH OF OCTOBER (*concl.*)

(A)

SIR GEORGE COBURN arrived a few minutes later and in a purely unofficial capacity. Chief-Constable Scott, who had spent the interval in telephoning, then had with him a short interview. Then Veer, who had returned from a visit to No. 124, was with them for some time. Eaton seemed to be here and everywhere. He also had a conference or two and found time moreover to examine the outside of the shutters, the lock of the broken door and even the contents of the ash-bin.

The rest had gone their several ways; Orwell back to the station, the photographer to the Yard, the finger-print experts to their homes after spending a couple of hours in looking for what wasn't there, and most of the constables to their normal duties. The divisional-surgeon had gone long since but in the morning would come the post-mortem when his preliminary report would be supplemented by more exact observations as to the extent of the injury.

Ludovic Travers, having had a word with his uncle on his arrival, found himself thereafter at a loose end and spent the time in making a circuit of the empty rooms on the ground floor. Whether his wanderings were aimless or with an object is hard

THE NIGHT OF THE 11TH OF OCTOBER (*concl.*)

to say, but it rather looked as if he were trying to absorb the atmosphere, to get into the milieu as it were, of what was for him an extraordinary house.

The furniture smug and massive, the marble mantelpiece with clock and bronze figures, the table with macramé covering and woollen flowers beneath a glass dome, the engravings after Martin, Greuze and Landseer; all that dining-room for instance was a sort of queer anomaly, with the telephone a curious anachronism and the thought of murder a discord incredible and blatant. In the air there still seemed to hover the smoke from the flashlight but the general atmosphere was not sinister; it was merely unreal, theatrical and somehow hard to accept.

The house itself was deathly still. From outside came the splash of rain but even from the drawing-room there was no sound. In the air was a chill and the ash of the grate gave to the room a forlornness that was almost drab. He hunched his shoulders in the big coat and wished he could hear again Scott's offer of a cup of tea. And when the sound of voices in the hall announced that the powwows were over, he was by no means sorry to be rid of his own company.

Sir George was looking rather worried. Normally a man of considerable shrewdness, he was feeling at the moment full of information, hurriedly absorbed and badly digested. He could see little daylight; lines of action and perhaps methods of approach but little that was of immediate promise. It was Scott's pigeon it was true, but for all that he would have been relieved to hear less of the abstract and more of definite and tangible results.

"A deplorable business!" was his trite but feeling comment.

"It certainly seems to have its unusual features," said his nephew, who felt that under the circumstances he had better say something. Then he returned to Scott. "It was awfully decent of you to let me come along. I hope I haven't been too much of a nuisance."

Scott smiled. "To tell you the truth Mr. Travers, I don't think you've said three words beyond 'yes' and 'no' since we got here. I'd rather like to know, as a matter of pure curiosity just what you've been *thinking*."

Ludo was horrified. "Good Lord! You don't suspect me of being one of those amateur people who come along and settle everything?"

"I don't know; you might be a dark horse."

"Dark! I'm as black as Egypt's night."

Sir George was regarding his nephew with a slightly puzzled air. Why he and Scott always got on so well he didn't know. When Ludo had remarked casually earlier in the evening that he supposed he couldn't come along, he had noted with vague disapproval that Scott had made no objection. He would have been the last to deny pride or affection but the fact remains that he had no use for the literary temperament. There was perhaps one saving grace; Ludo took after the Coburns in looks even if he did find the pen more profitable than the sword.

When the five of them reassembled in the drawing-room they found the exhibits placed on the table and round these they grouped themselves. The fire made a note of comfort and Scott stoked

his pipe as soon as he sat down. The amateur retired discreetly to a corner.

The details of that conference would be too long to give in their entirety. The main arguments and high-lights were however as follows.

"We will put our ideas into a common pool," said Scott, "and examine them with as little discussion as possible. Then we can discard and see what's left. The only two things I would say however are that firstly the writer of the letters has apparently lived up to his promises and that secondly this case, as Sir George agrees, throws us more into the public eye than any of us can remember. As the murder is in the nature of a challenge the public will expect quick and definite results. I do not admit for a moment that the peculiar circumstances will alter either our methods or our attitude but I do suggest it as an additional stimulus. As far as the Press are concerned, for to-night at least, a six line smudge has been issued from the Yard. Inspector Veer has recognised, as we expected, that already the case is one that will make demands with which his division will be wholly unable to cope, at least unaided."

From his notes Veer gave his first, and as he was careful to insist, tentative re-construction of the crime.

"The murder was committed by somebody who was perfectly familiar with the household. He knew the housekeeper was always out on Thursday nights and he had a perfect knowledge of the lie of the house. He knocked at the back door and while the maid was looking at the parcel he had prepared, entered the front door with a Yale key

—a duplicate, or one stolen or even lent him for the purpose—and went very quickly to the dining room. He was wearing rubber soles and had probably drawn over them a pair of socks since the carpet shows no trace of mud.

“He was known to the dead man otherwise there would have been a struggle and a cry. With the knife there, one of a common type used by most cooks and from its sharp point particularly murderous, he struck the deceased as he rose from the chair, using a gloved, right hand. The blow was dead straight to the heart. Then the murdered man was thrust back in the chair. The murderer entered the pantry and came out after fastening the door. He then bolted the outside pantry door, and locked the dining-room door. In the waistcoat pocket of the dead man he put the prepared paper so as to show us that the murder was the one announced. Then he rang up Exchange, using as few words and speaking as quietly as possible and then left the receiver off. Then he let himself out of the dining-room, re-locked it and left the house. The times taken can be tested by trial.

“With regard to possible suspects I discard Adams and Cardon, unless either employed a confederate, since neither could have written the “Marius” letters. The man Steward I discard for the moment. He was alone in the house all the evening it is true. His supper was laid in another room and he claims to have spent the time reading a book, which I saw. Before their quarrel he used to play cribbage every Thursday night while the two housekeepers went out. He is well over seventy and far from active.

THE NIGHT OF THE 11TH OF OCTOBER (*concl.*)

"The most promising line seems the writer of the letter from the 'Constable Hotel' but then he's never been inside the house. Also he'd not have been such a fool as to leave behind him such an obvious clue as his letter. Then there are the four nephews who inherit in all probability. Their alibis will have to be inquired into and all the while there is to keep in mind the fact that the murderer is the writer of the 'Marius' letters."

Next came Eaton and he seemed far less certain.

"If you don't mind, gentlemen, I'd like to go over some things that puzzle me. The first is the parcel. It was labelled for No. 129 and the name and address could have been got from a local directory. Now 129 is just across the road. Why then should the murderer entice the maid across the road and then leave by the *front* door where he'd be bound to run into her? Why didn't he address the parcel to a corresponding number at Maple Terrace? The maid would then have gone out by the back and returned by the back."

"I suggest," said Scott, "that as the distance would have been greater, there was the risk that she would have asked permission before going out so far. Also the back way is unlighted and she might have been too nervous to have ventured at all."

"That satisfies me sir," said Eaton. "The next point is, why did that nephew from South Africa have the bad luck to call on his uncle the only evening he was ever out?"

"I ought to say here," said Scott, "that a man answering to the description and signing himself T. W. Richards—obviously an alias for Richleigh—was at the Constable Hotel from the 1st to the

3rd inclusive. He left on the morning of the 4th with a heavy suitcase, bound for Liverpool Street and that's the last heard of him. Superintendent Wharton is handling that now."

"All the same sir," insisted Eaton, "I don't see why T. W. R. should have been so ignorant as to have called to see his uncle when he was bound to be out, and so lucky as to have come and murdered him on the only night when the housekeeper wasn't in."

"He might have learnt about the housekeeper later," remarked Veer.

"That is so," agreed Eaton. "Still, I thought it worth mentioning. Now about the maid. We all recognise that the murderer must have summed her up uncommonly well. But there's something curious arising out of that. We know he must have planned out his times to a second, *but*, he didn't know it was going to rain. Suppose the maid had stopped in the house waiting till the end of the shower. What would have happened to his scheme?"

"Perhaps he had two; one for fine weather and one for wet," suggested Scott.

"Well sir, to-night was both," retorted Eaton. "However, one or two smaller matters and then I've done. Was there any discussion of the 'Marius' letters in this house? If the deceased had so many enemies as we're told, why didn't he shut himself in? And the last thing I'd like to point out arises out of Inspector Veer's statement. If a man so vindictive as the deceased is represented to be permitted his housekeeper to keep friendly, after the quarrel he had with Steward, with the Steward

household, it shows she must have had him absolutely under her thumb."

"I think your remarks most provocative and important," said Sir George. "I might suggest however that Richleigh was hardly so much under her thumb as it appears. He certainly deceived her over the will."

"There *might* have been a will sir," said Scott. "If there were, then the whole case is clearer. Possibly the murderer took it and then we have a motive to work on. Still, leaving that for a moment, Eaton's questions brought one at least to my mind. Why should the murderer not have opened the dining-room door and dashed out into the street? There was only a helpless woman in the house and he must have known her temperament pretty well, as Eaton remarked. Even if she'd screamed he could have got away with absolute ease."

"The 'Marius' letters tend to show that he preferred any line of conduct that was spectacular or sensational," suggested Sir George.

"I agree sir," added Veer. "Also perhaps it was desperately important that he should not be seen, even from the back. Suppose he were lame or a hunchback, or slow on his pins like Steward?"

Travers was just smiling to himself at the thought that while everybody seemed to be right, somebody had to be wrong, when he caught his own name. "Anything strike you, Mr. Travers?" Scott was saying.

"Er—may I have another look at the hotel letter?"

"By all means," replied Scott and passed it over.

"Am I supposed to handle it with gloves?"

THE PERFECT MURDER CASE

Scott smiled tolerantly, "It's been examined. Richleigh probably handled it to-night. You'll see the prints on it."

They were indeed perfectly clear where the expert had exposed them; on one side a thumb and on the other two fingers. The letter appeared to interest him but when he passed it back the remark he made was decidedly disappointing. "I suppose this is really the hotel paper?"

"We shall know some time to-night," replied Scott with a perfectly serious face. "About those tests. Shall we try them out? You like to see them Sir George?"

"Very much!" was the reply, and the party made their way into the hall.

(B)

The first test was a simple one, intended primarily to see the amount of time on which the murderer might have counted had the parcel been duly taken to the occupant of No. 129. The test was necessarily an incomplete one since Mrs. Malone could not very well be disturbed again, but all the same Eaton twice went through all the actions which the maid could reasonably have been supposed to perform. Four minutes was the average and as Scott remarked, that was the minimum basis upon which they had to work since the murderer dared not expect more.

Next came the test of the sounds as heard by Adams. This was tried by all in turn. The listener stood, in the bedroom next to that in which the

THE NIGHT OF THE 11TH OF OCTOBER (*concl.*)

maid had been. In the closed dining-room was made the last sound presumably uttered by the murderer—the speaking to Exchange. The consensus of opinion was that the sound was quite audible to a listener on the alert as the maid must have been, and that it could reasonably be said to resemble a protracted cough.

There was next a short discussion on the feasibility of checking up the times as spent by the maid. To do so in her absence was however felt to be a hopeless business. The two important things were—

- (1) The interval that elapsed between the first opening of the back door and the hearing of the “cough.”
- (2) The time that elapsed after the “cough” and the whereabouts of the maid.

The first had been assessed at four minutes and there seemed no reason to alter it. As for the latter, upstairs in the bedroom she heard what was supposed to be the telephone message. According to her statement, however improbable the action might appear, she was at once in a panic. She had on a pair of silk stockings and her shoes since she intended surveying the effect in the glass. In this panic she seized her lisle thread stockings, the unfolded pair of silk ones and the paper and flew downstairs. On the top of the landing she halted for a second or two and hearing no further sound, went into the kitchen as quietly as she could. The panic possibly persisted but she had sense enough to open the door leading to the hall. Facing this she

replaced the stockings, put the new ones in the dresser drawer and the paper in the ash-pan.

From that time until she heard the knock on the front door she neither saw nor heard anything in the hall though its linoleum would not have deadened sound as a carpet would and though her ears must have been super-sensitive. The time between "cough" and arrival in the kitchen could not have been more than half a minute. Those times were regarded as definite and put aside for comparison with the next test.

This final one was the reconstruction of the crime and here Veer took the part of the murdered and Eaton that of the murderer. The action was that described in Veer's statement and ample allowance was made for listening pauses. And in spite of that, everything that the murderer did in the room could have been done in well under two minutes!

Now that was rather peculiar. The murderer had four minutes at his disposal and his best time for entering the house was when the maid was examining the parcel. Her attention would then be attracted away from hall and dining-room for an absolute certainty. But if he spent only one minute in the room where he did the murder then he must have waited three minutes before entering the house; surely a dangerous proceeding and one that cut very short his four minute allowance! Again, if only half a minute elapsed from the time when the maid heard the "cough" to her arrival in the kitchen, he must have made such a quick get-away that he could scarcely have done it noiselessly. Surely the maid must have heard some noise as she flew down the stairs.

THE NIGHT OF THE 11TH OF OCTOBER (*concl.*)

Well, that was argued this way and that and no satisfactory answer found. As fast as a reason was given just so speedily was it proved perfectly unsound.

"What about that theory I put forward gentlemen?" asked Eaton. "If he didn't leave by the front door a good many things would be explained; why the parcel was addressed to No. 129 for example. Not only that but it would account for all the time he spent in the room. Before he could leave it and before he telephoned he had to make his arrangements for getting out."

"I admit it sounds all right," said Scott, "but will it work? At any rate we'll soon see."

But there wasn't much seeing to be done. Every window was right and tight. Each one was opened and it and its shutters were found in perfect order. Each door had been fastened and as ceiling and floor were both normal and the chimney was out of the question, Eaton's theory hardly seemed workable.

"I'd rather like to ask a question," said Travers. "This type of shutter is, I believe, not uncommon abroad but I don't recall having run across it in England before. Surely it would be more sensible for the shutters to be operated from the inside and to act as blinds? You see the inconvenience. Before they can be shut at night you have to go outside, whatever the weather, to release the hooks that hold them against the wall."

"That's true enough," replied Scott. "But then, this is an oldish house. It's often easier to put up with things than have the inconvenience of alteration."

"And," remarked Sir George, "the inconvenience would not be brought much to the notice of the owner. It would be more the concern of the one whose duty it was to shut them."

"And if I might point it out," said Eaton, "they have their uses. Rain can't cut in between exposed sashes as it often does with uncovered windows. Also, if they were inside, they'd surely be a bit of a disfigurement."

"I'm sorry," said Travers. "It just occurred to me, that's all."

"There's nothing to be sorry about sir," said Scott with absolute sincerity. "It was an excellent suggestion and we can do at the moment with every idea we can get hold of. Still, here are the shutters and here are we. If he got out other than by the door, where he went we can go too."

"And of course," observed Sir George, "the same problems apply to any confederate who might have been employed by Adams or Cardon."

"Quite so. The only thing is that Adams might have told a lie and really did see the murderer leave. But we've got *her* where we want her."

They stood irresolute for a moment; then Scott pulled out his watch. "Hm! Well past one. I don't know what you think about it, gentlemen, but I'm proposing to sleep on it."

"I don't think you can do better," said Sir George. "In the very rare chance of your wanting me I shall be at St. James' Square."

Veer went with them as far as Kentish Town. But while Eaton was making a temporary bed in the sitting-room, Scott was making a fresh start. Over a breakfast cup of tea and a pipe he was

THE NIGHT OF THE 11TH OF OCTOBER (*concl.*)

getting ready for the moves that must come next. From the bookcase in the dining-room he fetched a handy Bradshaw and this he consulted frequently. What he achieved in an hour seemed a poor return.

5.30. Eaton. Breakfast.

6.00. Adams.

7.00. Cardon. All details of year.

8.00. Eaton Little Martens and Norwich.

9.0. Yard. Wharton. Enfield.

N.B. Boat train? Dossiers of Adams, Cardon and T. T. R. See Orwell.

When Scott, in his improvised bed of easy chairs, had finally curled his borrowed eiderdown around him, it was getting on for 3.0 a.m. Outside the wind had risen and the rain lashed steadily against the front, unshuttered panes.

CHAPTER VII

THE BABES IN THE WOOD

(A)

Up in the main restaurant of Durango House Ludovic Travers had just finished his soufflé and was sitting, hands on chin, thinking about shutters and letters, when the waitress brought him a note.

Can you spare a minute?

F.W.

Sir Francis was as usual at his round table in the north corner, with a waitress standing by.

"Morning, Travers. Hope you don't mind. Have a coffee? Two black coffees then!" And when the waitress had gone, "I was right about the black?"

"Quite right Sir Francis. You don't mind my pipe?"

"Not at all. I was just going to have one myself. What I wanted to ask you was this. I know you're extremely busy at the moment but a couple of minutes will tell me what I want. I was looking this morning at the prospectus of Britannia Films Ltd. What's your opinion?"

The other confirmed the one lump in his coffee and in the moment's respite collected his thoughts.

"The position is rather complex in my opinion, Sir Francis. After all, everything depends on what they do and how they do it. Their programme as

announced seems conservative and reasonably popular. The 20% proportion of British film lengths will soon be in operation and both Australia and Canada have preferential tariffs. The managing directors are shrewd men—you know what they made of Paliceums—but then on the other hand their production manager and supervisor is American in experience and background.”

“You mean exactly?”

“Perhaps I’m not sufficiently clear. What I mean Sir Francis is that if their productions are genuinely British in atmosphere and setting and, er, feeling, then the colonial market should more than absorb their output. The Company is under good auspices and seems to have excellent possibilities. Speculatively it would rather attract me.”

“Well, that’s clear enough. Between ourselves and the department, we’ve been sounded about taking over their publicity work.”

The other expressed polite surprise and gratification.

Sir Francis finished his coffee. “By the way I saw your uncle this morning on a matter of business. He was not—what shall I call it?—very avuncular. He didn’t ask after your well-being.”

Travers made a grimace. “For a very good reason. I didn’t leave him till two this morning!”

The smile on the other’s face faded into surprise. “You were with him all last night?”

“Of course it was all pure luck. I was rather interested in that ‘Marius’ case and happened to be in the right place at the right time. Scott—Chief-Constable Scott—and I are fairly old friends and he helped to work the oracle.”

"That's really most interesting!" He looked down and nodded abstractedly. Then he looked up quickly. "I wonder if, without divulging any secrets, you would like to lend somebody a helping hand?"

Travers was a bit taken aback. "Well, er, I think perhaps I would. I haven't done my good deed for the day."

"Between ourselves it will do me a good turn at the same time. As Chief Commissioner, Sir George has arranged permission for Franklin—you remember; he was at the 'Marius' conference—to go over the scene of last night's murder. Now I wonder, if I sent him along, whether you'd mind having a word with him before he went?"

"Not at all," replied the other, "but I'm afraid I shall be rather out of my depth."

But Sir Francis knew his listener. Like many others he had once been inclined to regard Travers as a bit of an original, an eccentric; brilliant in his particular line, but after that—! Then at all sorts of odd times he had noticed other things; unconventionality that was no pose, a catholicity and sympathy of ideas, a shrewdness of observation that nearly always hit the nail on the head, and a strain of boyishness that was unaffected and appealing.

As for Franklin, making his way towards the financial department, he too was disposed to regard the private room of Ludovic Travers as an investigatory *cul de sac*. He knew the famous *Economics of a Spendthrift* and had considerable admiration for its author, but in the bespectacled intellectual who had been on his side in that somewhat humor-

ous "Marius" conference he had precious little interest and still less hope.

Travers welcomed him with that engaging smile of his. He could see that his visitor was not quite at ease and groping, as it were, for a conversational opening.

"And how's the new department going?"

"It's rather hard to say," replied Franklin, somewhat stiffly; "we've scarcely had time to settle down."

"I suppose that is so," said Travers and tried another tack.

"Sir Francis suggested you'd be interested in that deplorable affair of last night. I assured him I shouldn't be much use to you but all the same I'll do my best. Of course there'll have to be the one proviso that I can give only my own impressions."

"How did the work of the Yard strike you, Mr. Travers?" asked the other, point blank.

"Er, well; I take it you've seen the mid-day papers. If you have I should say they underestimate the work Scotland Yard did and underestimate it pretty badly."

"I'm glad to hear you say that," said Franklin. "The Yard rarely gets the credit it deserves."

It was delightfully droll to see the pair of them, both being suavely courteous and punctiliously stilted. Then Travers sensed that things had better be livened up.

"Tell me," he said; "did you ever know a *published* Scotland Yard case of the detective novel type; solved, shall we say, from anything except a material clue?"

Franklin looked puzzled. "I don't know that I remember one on the spur of the moment."

"Well, it looks then as if this one is going to create a precedent. It has every appearance of becoming a case for Lecoq. What's your opinion of Lecoq, Mr. Franklin?"

"Lecoq? Well, he always appeals to me as the most human and credible of the storybook detectives."

"I haven't your judgment but I'm perfectly in agreement. Still, I'll tell you all I dare about it," and he ran rapidly through the evening and its problems. "What time were you thinking of getting there?" he asked when the quick recital was finished.

Franklin consulted his watch. "I'm in no great hurry. Somewhere about half past two I thought."

The other drew himself up from his reclining position and sat with pipe in hand, arms resting on his knees. There was a whimsical look on his face.

"You mustn't mind me in the least, but I'm going to say something curious and I'd rather like you to understand my point of view. Also, if you think I'm a fool, I'd like you to say so without any reservations." He paused to let that sink in while he relighted his pipe. Franklin hardly knew how to take him. He shot a look at the speaker, smiled and said nothing.

"Now I've told you a lot of what happened last night but I couldn't tell you what other people thought. If I told you what *I* thought you'd probably wonder what qualifications I had to think at all—that is to say about murder problems. But for

all that, are you prepared to throw in an extra minute or two on the chance of a gamble?"

Franklin was intrigued. He was beginning to find a strange charm about this "bespectacled intellectual" and in any case the conversation was vastly different from anything he could possibly have imagined.

"I shall be only too pleased, Mr. Travers."

"Do you know I'm chattering an awful lot. It's really unpardonable of me."

"Not at all. Please go on, Mr. Travers."

"Well, we'll be a pair of fools together. This case has interested me ever since that conference we had the other day and I intended by hook or crook to be at the show if there were one. I can see no other reason why, but because perhaps of my civilian simplicity of outlook I saw one or two things in a different way from other people. What I'm anxious to know is whether my intuitions were correct. Could you come round to my flat—14c St. Martin's Chambers—say at about 7.30 to-night? Ring up my man if you can't manage it after all."

"I'll be there," said Franklin.

"Good! I won't go into details now but if you don't mind I'll write down a couple of problems for you."

And this is what they were—

- (a) You are Sherlock Holmes. In a dead man's pocket you find a letter (no envelope) which has been in that pocket and read frequently for ten days. Calculate the wear marks, assuming the paper to be good quality, hotel parchment.

- (b) Take three yards of fine cord and get out of a shuttered, fastened window, and then fasten everything from the outside.

"In a bracket I've written 'Mrs. Cardon'," said Travers. "If you can get from her a list of visitors to the house during the last few months, you'll have done some good work in my opinion."

He rose to his feet. "Do you know I feel perfectly ashamed of myself. But do you ever have intuitions? Cross-word puzzle ones?"

Franklin smiled. "Sometimes."

"Then you know what intuitions are. I've an aunt who'd never believe it if some scandalmonger told her I could do long tots, but if she said to me, 'What's a theological treatise in nine letters?' and I replied, 'Upanishad,' she'd tell everybody how clever I was. Well, it's the way of the world. At 7.30 then. 14c St. Martin's Chambers. Good-bye."

And he showed a rather bewildered Franklin out of the room. But as soon as the door was shut the first thing he did was to give a whistle, rather a dolorous affair that sounded like a reproach. Then he contemplated his pipe for a second or two and slowly relighted it.

(B)

As the lift decanted Franklin on the Axminster carpet before the door of No. 14c, he felt by no means happy about the lounge suit he was wearing. As Palmer, Travers' man, ushered him into the dining-room and he took a hasty view he was decidedly nervous. But it lasted no longer than a

sight of his host. If suede slippers, a flannel cricket shirt, a blue blazer and grey trousers are not a sufficiently reassuring garb, one would be hard to please.

"I thought we'd stay here if you don't mind," explained Travers. "I've got a job of work later. We're having the service dinner; neat but not gaudy."

After the meal they adjourned to the library, where in the middle of a veritable lining of books and filing cabinets, they settled down before a glowing fire.

"You've got a wonderful place here," commented Franklin. "It takes my breath away."

"Easy enough when you happen to own the lot," said Travers. "Thanks to a fortunate choice of ancestors I didn't have to toil or spin. Now then; you were going to tell me all about Mrs. Cardon. How did you get on with her?"

Franklin's gesture expressed his opinion of that lady. "A tough proposition if you like! And she'd had a drink or two."

"The maid had gone?"

"Oh yes; she'd gone right enough. Scott is doubtless keeping a fatherly eye on her and she'll have to be at the inquest to-morrow in any case. Of course I saw the papers and I also got a good deal of information at the Yard this morning about that couple."

"An interesting pair!"

"Yes, and it was rather funny you should have mentioned the maid because that started me off right. There were a couple of men on guard when I got there. Mrs. Cardon let me in with a super-

cilious air and kept on trying to be what she imagined was high-toned; supposed I'd come from the police and wouldn't believe me when I said I'd nothing to do with them. Then I said I wouldn't dream of troubling her but could I look round and the maid could keep an eye on me. Then she started cussing maids in general and I chipped in and cussed some more and before I hardly knew it I was facing the good lady in the parlour, as she called it; both of us in easy chairs and full of gin and geniality. Then she supposed I'd come about the will and I said I thought there was something fishy about that business. Then you ought to have heard her! Phew! This time it was the nephews."

"You got what might be called the real dope?"

"I reckon I did. I think that woman told me every detail of the last few months; a lot of lies of course but the devil of a lot of truth. By the way, before I forget it. I don't know if you realised—I didn't from the press accounts—but Richleigh was remarkably bad on his feet. That's why he never went out. When he went to Tottenham he always had a closed car from door to door."

"That's news to me. I imagined him as fairly hale and hearty!"

"Well, I don't know what difference it will make but it's correct. However, to go on. I got all the visitors from her. There was no need to cross-examine. She talked and all I had to do was direct the traffic. The times are approximate and I also got their addresses or how to find them.

HAROLD RICHLEIGH. He's an actor. Called third week in September at supper time.

Thursday night, as Mrs. C. was out. Wanted to borrow some money, had some high words and cleared off in a rage without waiting to be shown out. Mrs. C. got her information from Adams and Richleigh.

FRANK RICHLEIGH. That's the school-master. Called following week early; Tuesday probably. Brought a bottle of old port. Very sociable and played three-handed cribbage. "Too much of the lahdi-dah for me," was Mrs. C.'s opinion of him.

REV. CHARLES RICHLEIGH. That's the parson at Little Martens. Called about three on the following Thursday, just as Mrs. C. was dressing. Only a courtesy visit as he happened to be calling on an old colleague nearby. Had some tea however. All "Our heavenly Father," and "My good woman," according to Mrs. C. who hasn't any use for him at all.

ERNEST RICHLEIGH. That's the lawyer and him you've heard about."

"And that's all the visitors?"

"Absolutely all. Except the maids and the housekeeper, not a soul has been inside that house for months."

"It's too easy," said Travers. "And what about the problems?"

Franklin smiled. "I think one's all right; the other I'm not so sure about. With regard to the letter, if the paper were stiffish parchment and even if it were read every few hours, it still ought to be reasonably clean. A bit grubby at the edges per-

haps but a lot would depend on the state of the pocket, the other contents, and the occupations and habits of the reader."

"Let me butt in," said Travers. "The letter in question was in Richleigh's pocket with other papers, all fairly clean and one at least more than a month old. I should say he was a man of fastidious, personal cleanliness and for another thing he was in a species of love. This letter, supposed to be from a nephew—the one mentioned in the press and with whom the police are anxious to get into contact—was not grubby; it was filthy. Where it was folded it had cracked. And something else."

He took a sheet of paper from the Queen Anne bureau. "I wonder if you'd mind putting this in my pocket; the breast pocket. First of all however, smear your finger tips with some of this charcoal."

When the operation was finished he took another sheet and folded it. "Now smear your fingers again and this time put it in your own pocket, and without thinking what you are doing. Good! Now let's have a look at the two sheets."

The difference was plainly to be seen. In the first case the paper had been held stiffly and the prints were clear. In the second, the fingers had shifted and the prints were blurred.

"You can try it over by yourself," said Travers, "and you'll find it comes right every time. Palmer and I tried it out several times before you arrived. Now if you take the facts about the letter found in Richleigh's pocket, its dirty condition and the clear marks, you may possibly think as I do that the letter was purposely carried in the murderer's pocket and made artificially dirty. Then after the murder

Richleigh's finger and thumb were made to grip it and place it in his own pocket where the police would find it."

"By jove!" exclaimed Franklin. "Also that would account for the length of time the murderer spent in the room."

"Partly. There remains the window. How did you get on with that?"

"Oh, that was easy!" said Franklin.

"Well, here's a lump of string. Let's go down and try it. In George the porter's pantry there's a capital double-hung, sash window of the very type and it's only a foot from the ground."

So down the lift they went. George grinned and touched his hat as by evident pre-arrangement he showed them into his cubby-hole, fuggy as a dug-out and chock-a-block with the weirdest collection of impedimenta.

"We've got a bet on, George," explained Travers. "This young lad has got an idea he can get out of your window and leave it shut after him. What's your idea?"

"And fasten the catch sir?"

"Oh rather! You see, George, safety catches were first invented to stop people getting *into* rooms, that's why the majority of us, excepting Mr. Franklin here, lose sight of the question of getting *out*. However, out he's going to get and in such a way that you'd never guess he'd been in."

"Well, good luck to him sir," said George, and, "Half a mo' sir, before you start," and he cleared the sill of its miscellaneous litter.

Franklin certainly made a good job of it. He

folded the six foot of string and put it round the catch, ends outwards. These he put behind the slot and then through it to face the audience. Next he raised the sash and pushed the loose ends between the sashes so that they hung down outside the room. He crawled out under the bottom sash and when outside, put the sashes again in position. A firm tug on the ends of the string, with knees braced against the wall, and the catch was levered into the slot. Another firm pull on one string only, and the whole six feet of string was drawn outside. The last operation however, was apt to fray the string owing to the tightness of the sashes.

The other two examined the catch. It was not quite home admittedly but to all intents and purposes the window was fastened.

"Well, I'm damned, sir!" said George. "Whoever'd a thought it?" And when he'd received his tip and the others had departed he was still a trifle incredulous.

"Of course its difficult with well-fitting sashes and stiff catches," said Franklin. "Those at The Grove are very loose; what you'd expect in an oldish house. What did you think of for the shutters? Knife?"

"That's it. First close the shutter which has the slot. Then put the heavy hasp of the other in position and while you close the shutter keep it there with a knife blade. Just as the shutter closes, pull away the knife and down goes the hasp into the slot by its own weight."

"Now we might see where we've got to," said Travers when they were once more before the fire. "Still, we'd better have a drink first," and he

pushed the bell. Two minutes later they got down to it again.

"If all the suppositions are correct," said Franklin, "we've done ourselves a good turn. We've eliminated the South African nephew and all question of a confederate. That means a long start on the the Yard. They'll put the maid and the housekeeper on the grill again and exhaust that letter clue."

"One peculiar thing did occur to me about that exit by the window," said Travers. "The murderer was careful how he got into the room but he took his time about getting out. Perhaps I don't make myself clear, but what I mean is, you expect a murderer to be anxious about a quick getaway, not an elaborate one."

Franklin took out his notebook. "I made some notes on that as soon as I worked out your window problem. The main deductions are these:—

- (a) He was sure he wouldn't be seen entering and by leaving by the window he did what seems to be a spectacular and wholly unnecessary thing, and for the sole reason that it mattered more about his being seen when he left than when he entered.
- (b) Therefore, he was somebody who would not have called any particular attention to himself had he been seen entering. He could have given some excuse and then, presumably could not have committed the murder. The "Marius" letters would then have turned out to be a damp squib.
- (c) He must therefore have been somebody

whom the maid could have identified. Therefore he must have been somebody with whom she had come into contact during her short period of service at the house.

(d) Why then did he not disguise himself? The answers seem to be:—

- (i) Because he couldn't conceal certain physical defects or deformities.
- (ii) Because he couldn't have got rid of the disguise for some reason or other, sufficiently soon after the murder.

"Now then," he went on; "when you add to these suppositions the facts that the murderer knew the house well, that he was a person of considerable education and that he claimed to have a sound motive, what need is there to go beyond the four nephews?"

"The motive of course being the keeping of the money in the family."

"That's it; and the fact that the deceased was a pretty disreputable specimen who might have smirched the family name rather badly."

"But what of the caller of the Wednesday night? South African nephew or not, he's a flesh and blood person."

"I'm going to see Adams about her account of him. But assuming that one of the four did it and laid the false trail, why shouldn't he have been the caller; in disguise of course? I admit that for that purpose he would have had to stay at the hotel as T. W. Richards, at least, that's a possible theory. That I can go into at once."

"How will you tackle the alibis?"

"I shan't. What I'm proposing to do is to rely on the Yard. If there's one thing we can be certain of it is that the Yard will turn these alibis inside out and if they pass them as correct then it's as sure as anything on God's green earth that correct they are. I've got hold of the information, by the way, that Superintendent Wharton is taking over the case. He's a first class man and I owe him more than I could ever state. I believe he's actually gone to France already about one alibi. Also I rather suspect that Eaton, whom you mentioned, is doing at least one other. He and I have done each other a good turn or two in our time and I ought to know all about those alibis pretty soon. Also, if the Yard haven't tumbled to it already I might exchange that information about the window for what I wanted to know."

"There is just one thing that occurs to me," said Travers. "If the case merely depends on the alibis of the four nephews, it isn't going to be the Perfect Murder. And when you get a man of education like Marius stating implicitly that he doesn't see how he can be caught, well, the two aspects are rather at variance."

"We shall have to wait and see if Marius always spoke the truth. By the way, why the 'Marius'? Is there any clue in that?"

"As far as I remember," said Travers, "Marius was a bloodthirsty old Roman who once remarked that the state would be all the better for a little bloodletting. This Marius is apparently of the same opinion. What are you going to do tomorrow?"

"Find out about the alibis if I can. After that it

all depends. Marius is only human and he must have made a slip for all his boasting. It's up to us to find that slip."

Travers smiled. "It's good of you to say 'we' but I'm afraid it's your show. Seriously, what can I do?"

"That remains to be seen. Go on as you've started and we'll set Durangos alight."

"God forbid!" said Travers hastily. "But there is one thing I can do. If you want a home from home, come up here and do as you like."

Franklin had started to express his thanks but he was too late. Travers had pushed the bell and Palmer had appeared with the celerity of a genie.

"Oh, Palmer; whenever Mr. Franklin comes along look after him and see that he has everything he wants."

"You *will* keep me informed?" he asked as they stood in the corridor waiting for the lift.

"You needn't worry about that," said Franklin warmly.

"Good! And just one thing. It's easy to give advice but, don't let this case worry you. Cheek on my part I admit. What's mostly curiosity on my part is damned hard work for you and the devil of a lot of responsibility. Still, I've got another intuition. You're going to work wonders in this case. I know it."

Franklin looked like a man who has done the first nine holes well under bogey. "Good-night, Mr. Travers. You don't know how——"

And he didn't; for at the first symptom of gratitude Travers had fled.

CHAPTER VIII

THE NET IS SPREAD

(A)

Now of course all this was perfectly preposterous. What precisely Franklin thought about it the following morning is hard to say. In any case he was at the mercy of chance and for him one gamble was as good as another. But when Ludovic Travers came to survey it in the cool air of reason after a seven hours' sleep he was forced to smile at himself. As he had felt at the time, it was all too easy. Scott had probably been laughing up his sleeve when he handed over that Constable Hotel letter and Eaton must have tumbled to the fact that to get out of that room was ingenious but easy. He had most likely thought it a trifle that could be settled by a minute or two's reflections. Either that or the pair of them, friendly enough out of harness, had seen no necessity to give information and disclose methods to an outsider and a dilettante at that.

But whatever the cause there was something in the morning's judgment that was much at variance with the evening's optimism and its *couleur de rose*. Things reassumed a right perspective. The inefficient or unseeing of Scotland Yard became once more the inevitable, the majestic, the farseeing forces of law and order. And just what had those forces been doing in the last twenty-four hours?

Chief-Constable Scott, with a self-operating alarum as good as Napoleon's, had woke up just after five. He brewed a pot of tea and made a slab or two of toast before arousing Eaton. Then Adams was called and by the time the breakfast was over, she made an appearance, once more in the pathetic role which seemed her chosen lead. But Scott's questioning had no effect on her story of the previous night. She stuck to it and nothing could prise her loose. She admitted however, having read the "Marius" letters and discussed them with Mrs. Cardon; an interesting insight into two hostile minds and what had constituted a ground of common interest.

Mrs. Cardon descended with the obvious idea of ingratiating herself with authority and was much less difficult. She gave a history of all visitors—much the same as she gave later to Franklin—and a comprehensive account of his nephews. But though she stood by the deceased in determined fashion it was not difficult to judge that her views would undergo considerable alteration when she discovered that there really was no will. The information supplied was of no great value; it was too discursive, too prejudiced and too unsubstantiated. She admitted discussing the "Marius" letters with Adams but neither of them had for a moment imagined they were ever likely to be concerned.

By this time the finger print experts had arrived for a final look round by daylight. Meanwhile there followed for Scott a certain amount of telephoning. The whereabouts of Harold Richleigh, which overnight had been discovered to be Nor-

wich, had made possible the killing of two birds with one stone. Eaton left for Liverpool Street and then by the light of a sunny dawn Scott surveyed for himself the scene of the murder and found nothing new. When Orwell arrived he arranged for the departure of the maid, her attendance at the inquest and the isolation of the house. Then there had to be the examination of the chauffeur who last drove Richleigh to Tottenham. Moreover every scrap of local gossip had to be brought in and sifted and Steward was once more to be questioned.

Leaving this legacy behind him Scott left for the Yard. Here he got Superintendent Wharton's account of the Constable Hotel end of the business and compared the signature of T. W. Richards with the T.W.R. of the letter. The following was further decided on. Wharton was to leave for France by the boat train in order to examine Frank Richleigh's alibi. According to his brother, he was tramping the Aude Valley—the nearest address he could give—and was due at Quillan by the following day to receive the posted brushes. Before his departure for France Wharton would arrange enquiries into the dossiers of Adams, Cardon and the deceased and see to the continuance of the search for the South African nephew. It was recognised that Wharton himself should take the case over. In the meantime Burren should be given all necessary information and proceed to Enfield for a further interview with Ernest Richleigh, while Scott acted as clearing house till the superintendent's return.

To confine ourselves then to the new and imme-

diate drama—the alibis of the four nephews—and to follow up this drama chronologically, it would be as well to begin with the statement of Mr. Ernest Richleigh as given by him to Chief-Inspector Burren.

The Rev. Peter Richleigh of Little Martens, Suffolk, had three sons. The living was a good one and the further possession of a private income enabled him to send two of these sons to Cambridge. Of these two, Thomas turned out a bad egg; his sending down was over a particularly disreputable piece of business. He had then been lost sight of for many years and what he had done in the interval nobody knew. Ultimately he had reappeared as the proprietor of a billiard hall in Tottenham in partnership with a man named Lewin. Next had come some bother over a fire but the Company had settled and with his share of the proceeds Thomas Richleigh had acquired a hairdresser's shop. The shingling craze did him the best possible turn. He acquired another shop, "Mariette" by name, and both concerns were in the nature of little gold mines.

The second son, Charles, took orders and at his father's death succeeded to the living. He had four sons, the four nephews in question, and of these more will be said. It should be mentioned however that on his early death, his son Charles succeeded in his turn to the living.

The third son, Peter, ran away from school and after an adventurous early manhood finally settled in South Africa where he made good as the proprietor of a general store in Cape Town. From time to time he communicated with his brother

Charles—for Thomas he always had a peculiar antipathy—and on his death with his nephew, the new vicar. After the war however he realised his property and returned to England where Ernest Richleigh advised him in most of his re-investments. At first he made his home at Little Martens and as to the final disposal of his money, he made no secret of it at all. Charles, his favourite, was specially mentioned but each of the nephews was well looked after.

Then something happened. It was felt that the estrangement of the two brothers was, at their time of life, at the best a pathetic and unnecessary business. In the bringing together of the two Ernest, as the legal adviser of both, acted as go-between. The brothers met and Peter went to the Grove for a short visit. This first became lengthy and then apparently permanent. Moreover Peter Richleigh changed in an amazing way. Considering the old bachelor he was, he had been a cheerful and even genial companion at Little Martens. Now he cut his nephews dead. The letters ceased and those from Charles were unanswered. He refused to see Ernest and when in 1921 he fell from the second landing of No. 122 and injured himself so badly that he died a few minutes later, it was found that a will drawn up a week previously by a local solicitor had left all his property unconditionally to his brother Thomas.

Thereafter Ernest had for some time refused to act for his uncle, but later he had resumed his former relationship feeling that the least he owed to his brothers was to keep an eye on their interests. From time to time however Thomas had done his

best to set the four by the ears. He had tried policies of isolation and ingratiating but with poor success. Ernest confessed however that when he set himself to it, his uncle could be an entertaining character. Further he was head of the family, whatever else he was. Add the passing of time which cures most ills and you will understand why from time to time the nephews called on him and were in varying degrees of friendship, if not affection. Besides all this, as Ernest frankly owned, human nature is what it is. Thomas Richleigh received £30,000 from his brother's estate and from all sources his income was not less than £2,500 a year. One can forgive much for that!

About the dead man and his doings the lawyer was very frank. He was mean to a degree and yet with eccentric variations. For his guest at cribbage he would put out choice of gin, whisky or port and yet cheat flagrantly for the possible gain of a few coppers. A letter to the press about local tradesmen got him into hot water from which his nephew dragged him with difficulty. He was fined for abusive and blasphemous language directed at the local Salvation Army who had disturbed his Sunday sleep. He got himself into trouble with the housekeeper who preceded Mrs. Cardon and the affair not only cost him several hundred pounds but still persisted in the form of an allowance to mother and child. Mrs. Cardon had changed, or concentrated in herself, those tendencies and for some years there had been no open scandal. But Burren guessed how the new domestic arrangement must have been watched by the nephews and by Ernest in particular.

As for the four nephews, their history was briefly this. Ernest, now forty-seven years old, was senior partner in the firm he had entered as a boy, thanks to the interest taken in him by an old friend of the family. He was, *inter alia*, a churchwarden, captain of Muffley Hill Golf Club, president of the local Rose Society and—an O.B.E.

Charles, aged forty-five, had led a life so uneventful and blameless that nothing could be said about him. He was however a cricketer of note and still wielded a stout bat. He was a magistrate and married, his two daughters being at Cheltenham.

Harold was the adventurous outcrop, a cross between his two uncles. He too had quitted the job found for him—a bank in Ipswich—for something more romantic, the stage. The worst that could be said against him was that he was generous to a fault and had no enemy except himself. He had at first done well and the critics had noticed him. Then his wife died and his descent was rapid. Drink had helped and the rut in which after a few years he found himself was one from which there was for one of his temperament, no chance of escape. From time to time his brothers helped him financially. At the moment he was playing unimportant parts for Rupert Pyne's No. 3 Company, then in Norwich, and whose repertoire was principally Shakespearian.

Frank Richleigh, then thirty-seven, had had a far from brilliant career at Cambridge. He had at first found a job with a private school at Eastbourne where his cricket was his soundest qualification. From there he went to one or two old-

established country grammar schools and finally to Muffley Hill where he taught some mathematics and a little geography. At the moment he was enjoying a grace term in recognition of his ten years' work. He was said to be a man of brilliant but eccentric intellect and his hobby was sketching. He had exhibited several times at the shows of the New English Group. In the war he had had a good record of service in Gallipoli and Egypt but his health was not good and he invariably spent his winter holidays on the south coast.

Three things remain to be stated. Ernest Richleigh had read and discussed the "Marius" letters but he had never taken them seriously. Secondly, his alibi, as Inspector Veer had hinted, was foolproof. He was not a frequenter of the cinema but on this occasion he had accompanied his wife and daughter to the Rialto, Enfield, where immediately on its general release there was being shown the super-film, "Paradise Lost," a picture that had broken all records at the Pantheon, London. He had arrived at 6.0 p.m. and in front of his party had discovered a friend, the curate of St. Ethelbald's, with whom he exchanged criticisms during the performance.

Lastly there emerged what Burren considered more than a suspicion. It looked exceedingly likely that there had been between the four brothers some sort of an understanding; a league as it were, of defence. Whether that league had gone so far as to contemplate a division of Thomas Richleigh's money, whichever of them got it, was mere conjecture. But in Burren's mind was the vague feeling that all was not what it appeared on the surface

and that churchwardens and standers in high places were intensely human and touched with the same frailties that are more generally assumed to beset only their weaker brethren.

(B)

Travelling by Ipswich and Haughley, Detective Inspector Eaton arrived at Bury St. Edmunds before 11 a.m. A taxi from the station yard landed him in Little Martens in another quarter of an hour and as by an odd coincidence the driver was a native of that village, by the end of the short journey Eaton's knowledge of the Richleigh family and of the present incumbent in particular, was considerably augmented.

Leaving the car to wait beyond the gate, Eaton made his way over the gravel drive to the front porch of the creeper-clad and rambling vicarage. The first thing that caught his eye was the shutters, hung back by their hooks from the south windows. He studied them for a second or two, then rapped at the door.

"Mr. Richleigh in?"

"Yes sir," and the maid drew back to admit him. But the caller advanced to the threshold and no further.

"I wanted to see him last night but I was told he was out."

The maid looked surprised. "Oh no sir! Mr. Richleigh was in all the night."

"Now I wonder how they came to make that mistake," said Eaton and stepped into the hall. "No name. Just say it's very important."

The room into which he was admitted had its fellow in hundreds of villages. The vicar too, was of no unexpected type. He was clean-shaved, plump, of medium height, slightly fussy and wholly clerical. His smile was dental, conventional, vicarial and somehow condescending. His voice was reminiscent of visiting days and his consonants clear cut as facets. His proffered hand drooped effeminately.

"How do you do, er——"

"I'm Detective-Inspector Eaton of the Criminal Investigation Department," said the other.

The vicar looked rather helpless.

"I take it sir, you've not seen the papers this morning?"

"I'm afraid I haven't. You see they come by bicycle and we don't get them till noon."

"Then I'm sorry to say sir I've some bad news for you." He saw the other's face start in alarm and added hastily, "Your uncle, Thomas Richleigh, has died suddenly." He noted the relief and went further. "He was murdered last night."

"No, never!" The vicar was genuinely distressed and his vocabulary failed him badly. But he remembered his position. "Sit down, inspector. I am, as you may know, a magistrate, and, er——"

"I understand that sir, and know you'll do all you can to help," and in as brief a time as possible he gave a comprehensive account of the happenings of the previous evening.

"Terrible! Terrible!" moaned the vicar. "I think I ought to go to town at once to see my brother."

"That's for you to say sir. I told you what we got from Mr. Ernest Richleigh. The inquest's to-morrow, by the way," and he rose as if to go.

"You'll take some refreshment? A glass of wine and a biscuit?"

The detective glanced at his watch. "Well, that's very good of you, sir. Perhaps I will."

So the bell cord was pulled. As the maid entered the vicar gave an exaggerated frown to caution silence and when she had finally gone, "Shouldn't like this to get about, Mr. Eaton."

"There's just two things you can help us in sir. Did you read those extraordinary 'Marius' letters in the press?"

"Well, er, I did see them. I didn't consider them as things of which undue notice should be taken."

"Well, sir, when 'Marius' talked about committing a Perfect Murder, this is the one he meant. It was he who murdered your uncle!"

This was a shock. The look on the vicar's face was one of indignation, incomprehension and even alarm.

"Do you know of any enemy of your uncle who might have committed such a crime?"

The vicar shook his head helplessly. "I can think of nobody. He was a man of very material passions; a gross man in many ways. We are not all cast in the same mould."

"That's true enough sir." He finished his glass and again rose. "Just one other thing, sir, and as a matter of pure routine. As a magistrate you will realise the importance of the question and, in your own case, it's pure formality. The time of the

murder was, as I told you, 7.30 p.m. You I imagine, were in the house here all the evening."

The vicar flashed a look from under his eyebrows which told of the struggle between outraged dignity and the whole duty of magistrates. His voice had in it just the exact formality and reproof which the question demanded.

"I always compose my sermons on Thursday evenings. Mrs. Richleigh was with me as usual during their composition."

"Thank you, sir. A pure formality as you recognised." Then his eyes wandered to the windows. "By the way, I couldn't help noticing your shutters as I came by. Just like a policeman to notice things like that. Not much protection against burglars?"

The vicar's reply was conclusive. "We are not troubled by burglars in this part of the world."

"Well, you're lucky, sir," was Eaton's reply as he made his final exit. Two minutes later he was on his way back to the station and listening to the chatter of the driver.

"Yes sir; I've seen the parson whatcher call knockin' 'em about. His old father was a rare good cricketer too."

"Well, you wouldn't think it to look at him," was Eaton's comment on the son. Then drawing a bow at a venture, "Wasn't Mr. Richleigh in Bury yesterday?"

"I didn't see nothin' on 'im sir. He allust put up at the 'Griffin' when he do come in."

"That reminds me," said Eaton, with another glance at his watch. "I've got to see a man at the

‘Griffin’.” And hazarding a guess as to its locality, “You might pull up there, will you?”

Luck was with him. The vicar *had* been in the town the previous day. Where he had been did not matter; the certain and undeniable thing was that the ostler had put his pony in the trap and he had left at 5.30 p.m. So much for the alibi. With two minutes to spare Eaton caught the local to Thetford and an hour and a half later, was in Norwich.

(c)

Having made his report to the Yard as arranged beforehand Eaton got from the station sergeant his bearings for the “Classic” theatre. In five minutes he was before the door of that dingy haven of the classics. The large bills attracted him with their notices of the repertory programme and the names of the company in letters proportionate to the size of their salary. The previous day had been early closing with a consequent matinée—*Twelfth Night*—and in the evening had been *Macbeth*. The name of Harold Richleigh did not appear at all nor was his photograph with the numerous others in the vestibule.

Eaton peered through the grille of the box-office. “Can you possibly tell me,” he asked the ‘young lady’ in charge, “where I can find Mr. Harold Richleigh?”

The novelette was put down gradually. “Mr. Harold Richleigh?”

“Yes. I wanted to see him last night but I understood he wasn’t playing.”

She consulted a programme. "Oh yes he was. He was doing the murderer!"

"The devil he was!" began Eaton, and then caught the context. "I beg your pardon. I'm sorry to trouble you but it's really most important."

She rose languidly and having locked the entrance to her cage, looked up the address. And at 73 Catlow Street an unmistakable landlady opened the door.

"Could I see Mr. Richleigh please?"

The landlady gave him a shrewd look. "I'm sorry, but he's out."

"That's a pity. I really wanted him last night but they said I shouldn't find him in."

"He was in till six and then again at eleven." Eaton's face expressed such intense disappointment that she gave some further help. "I expect you'll find him at the 'Dog and Pheasant'. That's where they usually get to. He said he'd had some good news."

"Another dead end," thought Eaton and set off again. He found the hotel and with a sure knowledge of his man, pushed open the door of the billiard room and entered. The air was dense with smoke and by the light of the arcs at least a dozen men could be discerned. There was the noisy back-chat of hilarious and lubricated voices as the game of snooker concluded. Everybody seemed to be talking at once.

"As before for you, Tom?"

"I never thought he'd get that black!"

"Five Guineases, George! No; make it six."

"Bring me a packet of Gold Flake!" and so on. Eaton followed the marker out of the room and

then button-holed him. "Just slip back and give Mr. Richleigh the tip he's wanted badly outside. Is there a private room here, by the way?"

But when he got Harold Richleigh to himself it was clear that the difficulty was not going to be to make him talk but to stop him. He had stopped sufficient drinks to make him eloquently benign and a lover of mankind—with one exception, his uncle. He was a man whose face told its own story, the one that Burren had heard. What he had once been could still be guessed in spite of the boisterous vulgarity of his person. A family likeness could be discerned; the coarseness of the face could not conceal that.

The wheat of his communications, separated from the mound of chaff, was however a poor handful. He had seen the mid-day paper and a damn good effort somebody had made of it. For tuppence he'd have done the job himself. That bitch of a housekeeper was the one to watch. 'The old swine had only got what was coming to him. People didn't fall downstairs by accident, and so on *ad nauseam*.

Eaton couldn't follow all the allusions, but from the sum total he got an impression or two. But one fact was again clear and the stage manager confirmed it. Harold Richleigh had played the first murderer in *Macbeth*. So much for the alibi.

That Eaton was depressed during the long homeward journey goes without saying. As far as he could judge, the four nephews were already eliminated and the case of the Perfect Murder was still to be begun. Where to begin it was the problem that occupied his mind. Admittedly it might

THE PERFECT MURDER CASE

not be his affair, he might be taken off the case altogether. But somebody would have a long row to hoe and what was more somebody was by no means unlikely to be asked soon by the one above him to show results. And as that badgered one would in his turn makes demands, to put it charitably, on his subordinates, and they again on theirs, it seemed as if the Perfect Murder Case would be a memorable one for a good many.

"If ever I have a son," thought Eaton, "I'm damned if I call him Marius!"

CHAPTER IX

THE FOURTH ALIBI

(A)

WHEN in his earlier years Superintendent Wharton had satisfied himself that the man who could offer something extra would sooner or later get his chance, and had followed a natural bent by specialising in French, he did himself a good turn. The chance came in the well-remembered Simone Case. His superiors were so impressed with the fact that he had repeated in the vernacular the long conversation between the brothers that he was thereafter a marked man. His French, it must be confessed, was fluent, his vocabulary adequate and his accent not too insular. But that was all. He certainly could not think in it and it is doubtful if he could have sworn in it with any degree of fluency.

The journey to Toulouse was a good one and in the slower parts of the final stages the time passed quickly enough; most of it in conversation with a delightful old gentleman who was going on by road to Foix the following day, and who recommended the Grand Hotel des Pyrénées, where he himself was spending the night, as the only one in Quillan that was worth the name.

The hotel certainly looked comfortable enough. In the lobby a pleasant faced woman of fifty

greeted the other traveller with that welcome which the regular visitor deserves. "You have a room, Madame?" inquired Wharton, his fellow traveller standing by ready to put in a good word if necessary.

"Why yes. Monsieur desires it for how long?"

"My affairs are rather uncertain," replied Wharton diplomatically. "To-night and possibly to-morrow."

Madame's, "Bien monsieur!" was as amiable as if he had said, "A month." She called, "Maximilien!" and when the general man appeared indicated the guest's bag and gave him his orders, all however in the patois of the district—as unintelligible to the Englishman as if it had been Chinese.

But when Wharton picked up the pen to sign the register and ran his eye down the names, there stood out something that he hardly expected, at least so soon; the name "F. Richleigh" and the address, London.

"You have another Englishman here?" he observed to madame.

Madame leaned her plump elbows on the counter and discoursed at some length. The gentleman had arrived that afternoon by road, all dusty, pouf! like that. He was a real Englishman; the clothes, the boots, the pipe. He spoke very little, not like monsieur. Oh yes; English were fairly frequent in that part. A table for two? Why certainly it could be arranged. For monsieur, room No. 3, and dinner in a quarter of an hour.

He had a hasty clean up and in ten minutes was sitting in the far corner of the lobby, well

behind a copy of the *Journal*. In a few seconds he was rewarded. There came into the room what could have been only a fellow countryman, in tweed plus-fours and brogues and with that air of aloofest detachment which is always misinterpreted by the foreigner. He had a likeable face, tanned with weather and full of personality. To Wharton's eyes he looked good; something which one might gladly claim as English in its happiest sense; something clean and wholly reliable.

Madame's voice was heard and she too came into the lobby. Richleigh rose to offer his chair and at madame's "Ne vous inquiétez pas, monsieur," looked rather awkward. You could almost feel the flush on his cheek. He stammered, shook his head and in final confusion produced in an atrocious accent, "Je ne comprends beaucoup français, madame."

Then happily the bell rang. People appeared as if by magic and everything was bustle. Wharton moved off last. He was feeling uncommonly hungry and in the air was a hungry smell.

But as he sat down, his companion at the table looked surprised and no wonder. There were plenty of empty tables and why shouldn't he have been left to himself? Still, he maintained his air of aloofness and when his soup arrived, ate it leisurely like a man who wants a meal but has plenty of time in which to enjoy it. At closer view the face was still pleasing and the eyes remarkably arresting. They were big and brown and somehow plaintive, and at their corners were little wrinkles. Wharton wondered what the voice would be like and set the ball rolling.

"I hope you didn't mind my planting myself at your table, Mr. Richleigh?"

There was nothing aggressively English about Wharton and he was not in the least surprised to see the other's quick start at the sound of his native tongue fired at him across that four feet. The answering voice had in it considerable charm, for all the reserve it expressed.

"My name *is* Richleigh. How did you guess that?"

"Saw it in the register." He paused to despatch the waiter for a half bottle and then explained further.

"I really came to give you some news. However much it surprises you we'll just chat in the ordinary way. No need to shout it to the whole room. You've seen the papers, Mr. Richleigh?"

"Can't say I have. What *is* this news you're talking about?"

"The murder of your uncle!"

Richleigh looked startled out of his life. He opened his mouth to speak and then changed his mind. He stared at the detective until the latter felt as if holes were being bored in him. Then what he did say was astonishing enough.

"Then it *has* come out?"

"Just what do you mean by that?" asked Wharton, with a look that never left the other's face.

The two stared at each other like cat and dog. "Exactly who are you?" asked Richleigh, and you could hear the anger in the voice.

"Superintendent Wharton of Scotland Yard, come to acquaint you with the murder of your uncle, Thomas Richleigh, of 122 The Grove,

Woodmore Hill, and to ask you what you know about it."

The other collapsed like a punctured tyre, but from relief. Then he smiled! "By jove, Mr. Ward! You had me scared stiff. I thought it was another uncle you were talking about."

"Just a minute," said Wharton. "Let's get this clear. Your uncle Peter has been dead these ten years."

"That's true," said Richleigh. "I'm sorry I said what I did. I don't know how to explain," and he looked really worried. "I suppose I'd better tell you. None of us—my brothers and myself—ever thought my uncle Peter met his death by fair means and sooner or later we thought something would come out. That's what I was thinking of."

Wharton sat back in his chair. For a moment the tension had been severe and both men felt it. Then Wharton smiled, the kind of smile that might have been given by a lion who had missed a particularly plump but evasive Christian.

"If I understand the facts Mr. Richleigh, the one who knows the answer to that problem will never be able to tell it." Then his smile became more friendly. "And the next time you're asked what you know about a murder, don't say you did it!"

"You must have thought me a callous sort of person," observed Richleigh. "It ought to be rather a shock to a man to be told his uncle's been murdered. Could you tell me; er, I mean will you——?"

Wharton went over the story and left very little out. "You see the kind of man we're looking for,

Mr. Richleigh; somebody of good education and with a perfect knowledge of the house. Is there anybody you can think of? Anybody with a sufficient grudge against your uncle?"

Richleigh shook his head. "There were times when a lot of people, including myself, might have wished him dead. It sounds a rotten thing to say, Mr. Ward"—"Wharton," corrected the other—"I beg your pardon; but my uncle was a pretty awful outsider. That's a charitable way to speak of him."

Wharton noted the hard look that came over his face and saw the curl of the lip.

"You saw my brother, Mr. Ernest Richleigh?"

"Oh yes. He helped us a good deal, but like yourself he could only go so far and no farther."

"What about the housekeeper?" suggested the other. "An unscrupulous vulgarian if ever there was one."

"I think we know quite a lot about her," hinted Wharton. "Did you see much of her, by the way?"

"Well, I suppose I did. I used to call on my uncle fairly frequently, when she was out if I could manage it. I don't feel very happy at the moment about those visits. I used to hate 'em like sin."

"I expect you did," said Wharton. "But there is one question I have to put to you, and it's the one we've had to put to every interested party including your brothers and Mrs. Cardon. Exactly where were you on the night of October the 11th?"

Richleigh looked at him suspiciously. "You surely can't imagine——"

"We imagine everything," interrupted the

other. "You would be the last to question the law and its methods."

"I'm sorry," said Richleigh. "It was rather ridiculous of me. October the 11th. Let me see. I crossed on the 5th and stayed in Paris till the 7th; got to Toulouse the same evening and to Carcassonne on the 8th. I wrote a letter to my brother Ernest from there and posted it the following morning. I was anxious to sketch part of the fortifications and found I'd left some brushes behind."

"Expensive ones?"

"They were, rather; about thirty bob the pair, and they were a special sort. However I did a pencil sketch which I've got upstairs in my rucksac. Then I left there on foot and got to St. Hilaire on the 10th. Next day I tramped to Limoux and got a sore heel so I didn't go on. That would be the 11th, when I was at the Cap d'Or Hotel. Next day I got as far as Couiza and to-day I got here."

"Well, that's perfectly plain, Mr. Richleigh. There'll be no trouble about checking up on that."

"I'll tell you what we'll do," suggested the other. "If you care to hang on till the morning we'll take a car and run back. You see," he explained, "I suppose like everybody else I did French at school but I always loathed the beastly stuff. Wish to God I'd stuck to it a bit better. I suppose you talk it like a native?"

"Well, hardly," laughed Wharton, remembering the patois.

"What I thought was that you could do the talking and see for yourself; that is, of course, if you are agreeable."

So it was left and Wharton was grateful for the offer. Englishmen abroad are of a set type and though it was extremely unlikely that two would have been at the same place at the special date, yet the matter could now be settled once and for all. And there for the moment it was left.

(B)

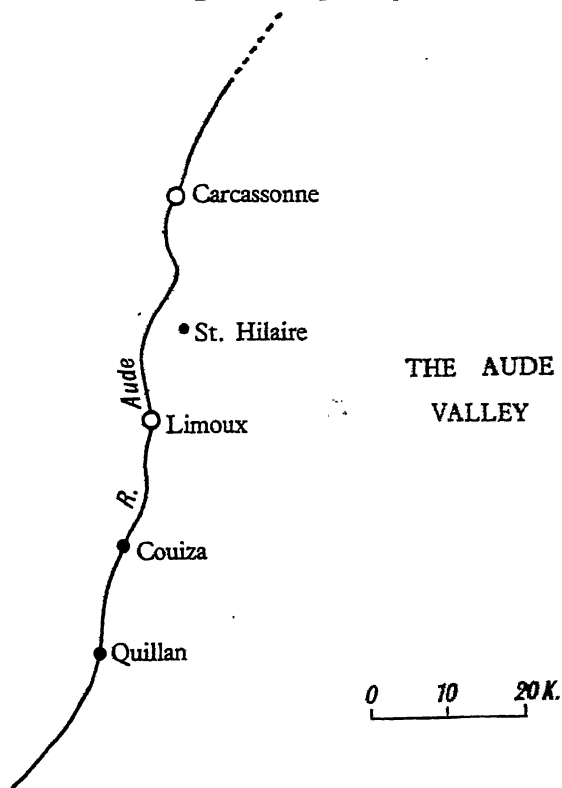
By the time they started on their journey the following morning Wharton knew as much about Frank Richleigh as some who had known him for years. As a companion he was reserved and even shy in manner; unexpectedly well informed but not dogmatic; perfectly mannered and, as far as Wharton could judge, without the least trace of pretension or conceit.

Of the work he had been doing the last few years it was plain he had a poor opinion, and he spoke of it as a tired man and a disgruntled one. On the question of cricket he was an enthusiast and for him the year began and ended with summer. As for the holiday he was on, it appeared that the authority by whom he was employed had introduced the scheme as a means of retaining in their service what had always been itinerant people. After ten years' work then, he was free from July to January. The August he had spent chiefly at Lords and the Oval, and had the weather turned out less fine in September, he would have left earlier for his tour in France.

It was moreover his first holiday in that country and had been taken, partly at the suggestion of a

THE FOURTH ALIBI

colleague and partly as the result of a visit to an exhibition of paintings by Henri Lecrue, whose Aude landscapes had not till then been known to him. Later in the year, after exhausting the Aude country, he was proposing to make for Marseilles to do the bits between there and Toulon. But he confessed that the death of his uncle might make a difference. He might even give up his work in



London and live abroad permanently. But that of course, would depend on the will.

The journey to Couiza was a short one. "You'll recognise the head boss," said Richleigh as they pulled up before the modest front of the Hotel de France. "Black beard; big as a shovel." And conveniently enough, just inside the door he was.

"My friend Mr. Richleigh here," explained Wharton, "has lost a rather important letter and he thinks he may have left it here yesterday morning."

The proprietor accepted the statement in good faith. The hotel was searched but there was no letter. Perhaps if M. Richleigh could return something would have been discovered about it. The general circumstances seemed to Wharton sufficient confirmation of Richleigh's statements and they moved on to Limoux. This time the business was more important.

The Cap d'Or, a quiet solid looking building, lay at the far end of the town, nestling over the rushing, shallow water and behind it the hills rose sheer. As Richleigh explained, his heel had been sore and the first hotel he came to had been the one for him.

As the two entered Richleigh was recognised. The face of the podgy lady who was conversing with the girl at the desk became a mass of smiles. Richleigh smiled too, rather sheepishly and then the girl of the bureau smiled also. Madame began a "*Quelle chance de vous revoir!*" Richleigh continued to smile but said nothing.

Wharton waded in. "M. Richleigh and I have been having an argument madame. I said he was

at St. Hilaire on the 11th and he insisted he was here. Now we've decided to let you settle it."

Madame burst out laughing. "Monsieur is wrong. You recall on Thursday Marcelle, the coffee and how he would pay." She seized Richleigh's coat and examined it. "You can't see the mark. Look Marcelle. Only the merest trace." All this was very familiar and friendly and rather like the examination of a returned relative. "And the heel? It is better?" And all the time there was Richleigh looking, as he afterwards confessed, very much of an ass.

"That's all right then," said Wharton when they got outside. "What happened to the coffee, by the way?"

"Oh, I upset the gadget they brought it in and made a mess of the cloth and my coat. The women cleaned it up for me."

Wharton looked up at the clock in the Square. "Well, my train goes in half an hour. Too early for a drink?"

Apparently it wasn't as far as Richleigh was concerned. Over the table they talked of things that had to be done. Wharton took a message for Ernest Richleigh and the other mapped out roughly his tour in case he should be wanted. His present intentions were to continue his holiday as if nothing had happened.

But as soon as the car had disappeared Wharton profited by his prevarication. It was immaterial to him whether Richleigh knew the times of the trains but there still remained much more than half an hour. At the hotel he again interviewed Madame. Was she certain of the date? Was it a

Thursday? The result was such a flood of confirmatory evidence that Wharton left finally with the absolute conviction that Frank Richleigh would not again be troubled by the police.

Next came the journey, by another car, to St. Hilaire. He remembered suddenly too that he had neglected to ask Richleigh the name of the hotel at which he had stayed. But he need not have worried; the Hotel des Voyageurs seemed the only one possible. And in response to his question about an Englishman who had spent the night there on the 10th, the reply of the proprietor and the description he gave of Richleigh were so convincing that the matter seemed definitely settled. There ended, though Scott didn't know it for some hours, the case of the four nephews. In the ten minutes that were left he sent off a telegram. Scott might as well know at once how things stood.

Then began a journey that was long and yet fully occupied. Assuming that the other alibis were correct, where was the best place to recommence at? Had Thomas Richleigh's former housekeeper still a grievance? Had she relatives? What about the neighbours of the dead man? Had he made a will? What about Steward? What of Richleigh's earlier years, that period when he had been lost sight of? Had he made enemies then? Had he been blackmailed? Had Peter Richleigh really a son or had that letter been planted, as Scott had suggested? Who wrote the "Marius" letters? What could be got from them by an exhaustive study?

Add to these the weighing up of the value that might be obtained by Press publicity, the wonder-

THE FOURTH ALIBI

ing what had happened in his absence, and the preparations for the next steps in the campaign and you have an idea of how Wharton occupied his time on that journey. At four o'clock the following afternoon he was in Chief-Constable Scott's room, going over it all again.

CHAPTER X

FRANKLIN STARTS TO WORK

(A)

As Eaton came out on the pavement he stood irresolutely for a moment as if undecided which way to go. It was then that he caught sight of Franklin.

"Hallo Jack! I thought it was you. How are things going?"

"Can't grumble," replied Franklin. "And you? You're looking pretty fit."

"That's not my fault. Had about eight hours sleep in three days. Which way were you going?"

"Anywhere that will suit you," was the reply. "What about some food? Or were you going home?"

"Not I, while the government pays. You know anywhere about here?"

Franklin did; as a matter of fact he had it all ready for the contingency. Five minutes brought them to the "Jolly Fishermen" and the side door that led to the dining-room. On the way he explained his appearance at the inquest on the twin lines of busman's holiday and that where the carcass is there will the vultures be gathered together. Eaton had heard a rumour that the other was setting up in business for himself, an idea that Franklin could not very well deny. He did admit however that as a freelance he was interested

in the case, if only to the extent of wondering how things were going. As far as the question of beating the Yard at their own game was concerned, well, he wasn't such a fool as that.

They found a secluded corner and over a typical hotel lunch waded at once into shop.

"Well, what did you think of the inquest?" asked Eaton.

"That you fellows didn't give much away."

"There wasn't anything to give away. Or were you referring to the parcel?"

Franklin decided that ignorance was the safest line. "Parcel? What parcel?"

Eaton told him. "You see," he added, "Adams would have been marked for life if that had got out. After all, the public wanted to know if he was murdered and who did it. Well, they know he was, and for the rest they know as much as we do."

"Exactly! You know who didn't do it."

Eaton lowered his voice and leaned forward confidentially. "Between you and me Jack, I'm not so sure of that. As far as I can see the only people who did it are the ones who couldn't have done it."

"Now look here, Tom," said Franklin with perfect candour; "before we go any further there's something you ought to know. I'll discuss generalities with you as long as you like. I may not want to solve this case as much as you do but if you give me information and I make use of it, I ask you; is it fair to you?"

"I don't see it," said Eaton. "Here's you and I who've done each other a good turn or two in our time. I'm off duty and if I like to talk over this case

as a private individual, why shouldn't I?" Franklin was about to speak. "Just a minute. Two questions. Is it the duty of every citizen to help the law?"

Franklin smiled. "Go on."

"And am I at liberty to pick your brains if I get the chance?"

"You certainly are; such as they are."

"Well, that's my funeral. Now you've put me off. What was I talking about?"

"The people who couldn't have done it."

"Well, who could have done it? He was well educated, laid his plans well, had heaps of nerve and knew the house from floor to ceiling. Who's that suggest?"

"The four nephews."

"What about a confederate of Adams or Cardon?"

"Impossible! And in the latter case unnecessary. She had nothing to gain by murdering him. Further than that, under the sort of cross-examination you blokes would have given, either of them would have blown the gaff. But what about Steward?"

"He's definitely out of it, you take my word. He had no more to do with it than I had."

"Well, you ought to know. But what's wrong with the four nephews? Everything fits in."

"What's wrong? I'll tell you what's wrong. I don't know about the one in France because the 'General' is doing that himself and when he's finished with it you can bet your life it's final. But the others; every one's got an alibi as tight as a drum, with at least two sound and perfectly independent witnesses. I did two of 'em myself and I got Burren's account of the other. Listen to this

for example," and he gave an account of his two visits.

"Hm! As you say, that complicates matters," said Franklin sympathetically. "But if the alibis are perfect, why worry? You've only got to start all over again and we're used enough to that in our game."

"That's the trouble. There's something wrong somewhere; you know, when you're off the right road and something inside you says, 'Damn it all, this can't be right.' That's how I'm feeling." And he nodded his head disconsolately and continued to munch his bread and cheese.

Franklin went a step farther. "You've got something on your mind. Look here, Tom; I'll strike a bargain with you. You know I went round to that house and I don't mind telling you I saw something that may be useful. Answer me one question and I'll put my cards on the table."

"Good enough," said Eaton. "Fire away!"

"What's been done about T.W.R.?"

"To-morrow's papers will have a full description as given by the staff of the 'Constable.' There may be a composite photo made up from it. Also T. W. R. will be asked to come forward and make his statement. And that's all I know except that after he stepped out of the hotel he hasn't been seen."

"Well that's a sound enough answer. Now listen to this," and he gave an account of the method of leaving by the window. "Try it yourself with some good catgut; it's easier. And have a look at the brass catch and slot of the west window and you'll see the friction marks. They come out as polish. Put

that across the 'General' when he gets back and see what he thinks of it."

Eaton clicked his tongue with annoyance. "Fancy missing that! Of course that shrubbery would mask his exit. But why no footprints?"

"Concrete path and then rain. But anybody could have missed the window. What about some coffee by the way? You in a hurry?"

"Why should I be?" laughed Eaton. "I'm doing pretty well."

Franklin gave the order and as they filled their pipes they had a look round. Then, when the coffee came, Eaton made up his mind.

"Look here Jack; I've got to get this thing off my mind. You're the only chap I'd tell it to, it's such stark lunacy. You may possibly think the same thing when I've done; still, here it is. I've seen three of those brothers at close quarters and I've formed certain impressions. As soon as I saw Ernest Richleigh I summed him up in my own way, right or wrong. Then last night I had a long talk with Burren and heard what he'd got to say about him.

"Then I've seen the second brother, as I told you. He's a parson and he couldn't have done it, but yet I got the same impression about him as I did about his brother. Then I saw the third, the actor, and he couldn't have done it, but various things he let slip and things other people told me strengthened the impression I'd formed about the other two.

"And it's this. It's my private opinion and I can't get away from it that though none of them did it, yet those four brothers did away with Richleigh. I

believe they've had and have got now, a sort of league of mutual help; that they held a sort of committee meeting and decided that if the family name was to be saved and this woman Cardon kept out of the money, there was only one thing for it. Then they schemed it out and decided to lie like the devil and stick by each other through thick and thin. That's what they did, and that's what they couldn't have done because Harold Richleigh would have blabbed when he was drunk and also the alibis are too perfect. Now have a good laugh!"

But Franklin did not laugh. He looked very much in earnest. "My God Tom; that would make a fine play! Think of Charles Richleigh as the scourge of God and with the fanaticism of a mad Puritan; Harold, partly fuddled and game for anything; the lawyer with the brains and the schoolmaster with the pluck. Can't you picture it?" and he gestured into space.

"Can't I? I've done little else since I thought of it and last night when I got the chance to sleep it wouldn't let me."

"I tell you what, Tom," said Franklin. "Let me think it over. It's full of problems but the chief one is how they could have made four perfect alibis with a wrong 'un among them. They couldn't have had a confederate. People can't be hired to commit murder nowadays. But could one of their women folk have done it? But of course that's ridiculous."

"Don't ask me," said Eaton. "I've got to get that nightmare out of my system or end up at Colney Hatch. Still, I bet I come back to it for all that." He knocked out his pipe and stared gloomily at the dust.

"Something you can do for me," said Franklin, reaching for his overcoat. "Ring me up about that French alibi, will you? If I'm not in, just leave a message. Some sort of code if you like."

"Same old address?"

"That's right. By the way, where does Adams hang out nowadays?"

Eaton consulted his notebook. "5 Tinker's Lane, Epping. Not a bad job, a tinker's."

"I know," laughed Franklin. "Wind on the heath, brother, and the wheel's come off the caravan. You for headquarters? Then we'll take a bus for Fisbury Park."

Whether his brains had been picked or not Franklin was uncommonly pleased with that morning's work. He knew a good deal more than when he started. For one thing he had full details of three of the alibis and the promise of the fourth. Later might come news of T. W. R. who was certainly, like the visitor of that Wednesday evening, a flesh and blood person. And while waiting for the remaining alibi, it was on that pugnacious visitor to The Grove that he decided to concentrate. Though the brothers had alibis, if he could prove that one of them had either impersonated T. W. R. by staying in that name at the hotel or had drawn that red herring of a threatening visit across the trail, then there would be time to consider further the theory that Eaton had advanced.

(B)

It should be borne in mind that in the department of which Franklin had taken over control

FRANKLIN STARTS TO WORK

some days previously, the usual inquiry work was going on. There had indeed been an unusual rush of business and, automatic as most of it was, yet Franklin's second in command was living laborious days.

Franklin himself kept one reserve off general routine; Potter, an ex-sergeant of police whom he had signed up on the day of his arrival and whom he knew for not only a sound workman but a tactful one. He proposed to go to Epping himself for an interview with Adams. If she could be more explicit, could remember some characteristic or peculiarity of the caller, there would be something solid to build on.

Potter was sent to Norwich by the 2.40. His chief mission was to find out everything possible about the movements of Harold Richleigh from the 1st to the 3rd of October. Any general gossip bearing on the case might also be collected and a photo of the actor would also come in handy. On the Sunday he was to call at Little Martens and find out the whereabouts of the vicar at that time and particularly on the night of the 3rd. Again he was to get a photo if possible. Potter of course kept what he thought under his hat, but all the same he couldn't see the point of all that photo business. When he knew Franklin better he would know that the gathering of photos was his particular fad when on a case. He liked to have his suspects with him on the premises, so to speak.

The other nephews, Ernest and Frank, had almost certainly been in town on the night in question, and he proposed to handle them himself, Frank through his eldest brother. But first of all

must come the interview with Adams and her first-hand account of the caller of that Wednesday night.

Things started badly. Franklin timed his arrival at Tinker's Lane for 5.0 p.m., a likely hour for tea and a family reunion. But the house was shut up. From a neighbour he learned that the father had received a telegram during the dinner hour; that he had gone to a football match at Tottenham and that Mrs. Adams had accompanied her daughter to the inquest from which neither had yet returned. To wait in the hope of Mary Adams' early return seemed a waste of time and he decided therefore to go round to Enfield by Waltham Cross and try to see Ernest Richleigh.

There was no difficulty about finding Ridgeway House and shortly after 6.0 he was in the lawyer's small workroom. When he learned that the caller was on business connected with his uncle's murder Richleigh's manner was most abrupt. It might have been a deliberate pose that he was assuming, but he certainly seemed sick to death of the whole affair and resentful of any attempts to connect him, even in the remotest capacity, with it. Franklin realised that he had to be handled carefully.

"Please understand Mr. Richleigh, I'm entirely at your mercy. I'm here merely as the representative of an interested party and there's no reason why you should answer any question I put to you. On the other hand, what I do want to ask is just one question which is liable to affect my client but which, we hope, will never be a public matter. I can't tell you more than that."

Richleigh had watched his man as a cat watches a

mouse. The impression he formed was evidently a favourable one. "What *is* your question? And is it the only one?"

"It *is* the only one. I admit it is a compound one and I repeat that you are in no way forced to answer it, as you very well know. To the best of your belief, where were your brothers on the night of Wednesday, October the third?"

Richleigh looked surprised, or was it relieved? "My brothers? Why, all four of us dined here that night!"

It was the other's turn to be surprised. Why had Richleigh recognised that suddenly spoken date? And before he was aware of it, he put into words the thought that came next. "May I ask what time they arrived?"

"You may; but you'll be breaking your word."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Richleigh. That was unpardonable of me. May I bid you good-night and thank——"

"Don't apologise," interrupted the other. "I don't know what you're getting at, Mr. Franklin, but I think one thing ought to be clear to you. Those of us who bear the Richleigh name are getting precious little out of this unhappy business but notoriety and possibly scandal. I think we shall emerge from both."

Franklin could find no comment but he nodded in assent.

"Just a minute," said the lawyer. "I'll see if my daughter is about," and he went to the door and called, "Dorothy!"

An answering voice was heard upstairs and then a girl of some eighteen years entered the room. At

the sight of the stranger she stopped short and threw a questioning look at her father.

"Dorothy, you remember a few days ago—the 3rd to be exact—when your uncles all came to mummy's birthday party. What time did Uncle Charles get here?"

"I don't know, daddy. About half past six I think. That's it, daddy; don't you remember? Uncle Harold met the train at Liverpool Street and they came together."

"Yes dear; that's right. And Uncle Frank?"

"Just as we were going to start. Don't you remember we scraped the mud off his trousers where he slipped down."

"That's right dear; about half past seven. Thank you, dear." He waited till she had left the room and then turned to the other with no word but with a face that was eloquent.

Franklin had nothing to say. At the outside door Richleigh put out his hand with a dismissive and final "Good-night."

"Good-night, Mr. Richleigh, and many thanks for your courtesy. If everybody I had to interview were as helpful, life would be more pleasant."

Framed in the doorway, his features unrecognisable against the light, Richleigh made a quick reply. The tone was elusive and a minute afterwards Franklin tried in vain to recapture it.

"If every person you interviewed, Mr. Franklin, had as little to tell, life would be more prosaic."

Now you would have thought that with so unexpected a windfall of information Franklin would have been extraordinarily pleased with himself, but he was nothing of the sort. He was vaguely dis-

turbed and exactly why he could hardly determine. He too had the feeling after contact with the lawyer, that all was not what it seemed. Even that gesture of resignation had smacked of the theatrical and the whole man had been too watchful, too careful lest something should escape more than the quota he had assigned himself. Yet you could not come to grips with it. The position held by Richleigh was impregnable; he did not commit the murder. And yet there it was; something in the background.

As for the visitor to The Grove, three nephews were let out. The fourth was abroad and if he were not, there was little possibility of checking his movements. He would have every right to resent questioning about a date, which had no apparent connection with the crime itself. Still, Adams should be asked about that caller as if Frank Richleigh were the person concerned. He arrived later than his brothers. His dirty trousers might mean that he had had a fall when running to make up lost time.

But the chief thing that kept cropping up in Franklin's mind was that uneasy feeling; the suspicion that Eaton had not been chasing moonbeams and that his theory was not so mad as it sounded. For all their alibis, the Richleigh brothers would pay for watching.

CHAPTER XI

FRANKLIN IS BUSY

As Franklin arrived at Liverpool St. to catch the Epping train, there caught his eye the multi-coloured posters of the Sunday papers. His own had contained nothing that he did not know already, but two of the others, the *Weekly News* and the *Workman*, gave promise of sensational disclosures, if their splash bills were to be believed.

THE STORY OF MY LIFE

by

ROSE CARDON

and—

LIFE AT 122, THE GROVE

by

ROSE CARDON

said the one, while

THOMAS RICHLEIGH AS I KNEW HIM

by

MARY ADAMS

announced the other. Franklin invested in two penn'orth. If they did nothing else, the papers would pass the time on a tedious journey.

His first hasty look through was, from the point of view of information, distinctly disappointing. But as he recognised, it was all very well for him to be superior. The public wanted anything it could get about the murder; it wanted something to get its argumentative teeth into, and the press supplied it. If that wasn't thundering good journalism, what was? He had to pay too, his homage to the adaptors who, out of the brazen utterances of Rose Cardon or the more perky periods of Mary Adams, had produced something so slick and palatable.

The story of the housekeeper was illustrated by three photographs; a flattering one of the woman herself, one of herself and her husband—the latter in the uniform of a private of garrison artillery—and a stilted, studio effort of Thomas Richleigh. The story itself was interesting. What it would be like, stripped of its verbiage and reduced to hard facts, Scotland Yard would doubtless soon be aware.

The things which were new or which he considered sufficiently important Franklin summarised in his notebook—

- (a) William Cardon was killed in action at Bethune, in 1918.
- (b) Mrs. Cardon first met Richleigh five years later. The meeting appeared to be connected with the hairdressing business at Tottenham.
- (c) She stated her implicit belief in the existence of a will but gave no very definite reasons.

For the rest, there were several hits at the expense

of certain indefinite people, whom Franklin knew to be the nephews. Mary Adams was mentioned patronisingly.

The account given by Adams was specially discursive. The adaptor here was a genius, since what he wrote came from precious little; moreover he had to bear in mind the ramifications of the laws of libel. She did however make the statement that she had no sweetheart and that there was no truth in the rumour that a young man was with her in the kitchen on the night of the murder. There were also various innuendos concerning the dead man and his relationships with the housekeeper. The only other interesting thing was that the reciting of that article accounted for the absence of Mary Adams the previous afternoon.

Franklin wondered too what Mrs. Cardon would say when she read her rival's effusion. If Scotland Yard, thought he, could put those two women, well chained up, at the opposite ends of a room and could then listen in, there shouldn't be much untold. Modern methods of interrogation were all very well but there were occasions when subtle variations of a Third Degree were more to the purpose.

Still, the reading passed the time pleasantly. It was 10.0 o'clock when he knocked at the door of 5 Tinker's Lane. It was opened by a small man with a drooping moustache whose shirt sleeves and unlaced boots told of recent rising. Inside the cottage could be heard the voice of a woman scolding a child.

"May I see Miss Adams?"

"And what might your business be?" was the

reply, given with such an impertinence of tone and look that Franklin read in it almost the exact amount the daughter had been paid for her journalistic outpourings.

"It's exceedingly important and connected with yesterday's inquest."

"Are you from the papers, young man?"

"It doesn't matter where I'm from," replied Franklin, taking a pound note out of his case and passing it over. "I want five minutes with your daughter and I'm prepared to pay for it."

With no explanation the man went into the room and was absent for a minute or two. When he came back he maintained his air of cheap importance. "You can come into the kitchen if you like. Round the back way."

There was nothing to be gained by indignation and round to the kitchen Franklin went. Mary Adams, with a pose of girlishness, was talking baby language to a kitten and her manner was more than off-hand. This was more than Franklin could stand. She at least could be put in her place.

"I shall be very glad if you can give me some information, Miss Adams. Before we start, I might as well inform you that I know *all* the events of last Thursday night."

There was a dramatic change. A look of fear came into her face and she stared at the detective without a word. Then he went on. "This is of course in confidence between you and me. I have no intention of making known any private matters—the parcel of silk stockings, for instance—but I must request you to give me all the help you can."

There was still no answer.

"You informed the police that on the night of October the 3rd, a man came to the front door of No. 122 to see Mr. Richleigh. At exactly what time was that?"

"I don't know exactly but I'd washed up the tea things and I hadn't started getting the supper."

"Nearer half past six, or seven?"

"No, it wasn't seven."

"Well, we'll leave that. Now tell me exactly what happened when you opened the door."

"I saw a man there. He'd a soft hat on and a muffler round his neck and an overcoat——"

"Was it a cold night? You don't remember? Never mind. Go on."

"And he had glasses on because the light shone on them and they looked all funny."

Franklin relaxed the iron hand. "Good! That shows observation. What next?"

"I was going to let him in because I thought he was Mr. Harold Richleigh and then I knew it wasn't him because he didn't wear glasses."

"Any other reasons?"

"He didn't speak like him."

"Well, why did you think at first it was Mr. Richleigh? Was he dressed like him? Had he any peculiar trick, say rubbing his chin, or anything else that Mr. Richleigh does?"

"Oh no; he just looked like him." And in spite of all examination that was all that could be extracted. Insistence might have been dangerous. If she thought it so necessary she could easily have made up information.

"Well," said Franklin, "let's look at it another way. You know Mr. Frank Richleigh very well

by sight, don't you? Now then; have a look at that sketch. Does that resemble him at all?" and he passed over the *Weekly News* which he had folded in readiness.

She looked at it vacantly, so little did the picture convey to her. "It wasn't him."

"You never had the least idea that the caller was Mr. Frank Richleigh?"

"No; I'm sure, positive it wasn't."

"I suppose it was too dark to see his hair. But had he a moustache; a bushy one?"

"I don't think he had a moustache."

"What would you say his age was?"

"I thought he was about middle; you know, sort of about forty. He was all hunched up."

"Hunched up was he? Just show me." And without any ado she hunched up her shoulders in the attitude of a man waiting in the cold. Franklin put the paper back in his pocket.

"What was the voice like?"

"Ever so angry. I thought he was going to make a row."

"Well now, I want you to try to imagine something. Suppose you had been sitting in the kitchen and you had heard the man speaking to somebody else outside. Would you have thought it was a tradesman or a gentleman speaking?"

She made a face which registered intense thought and then produced, "I thought it was sort of refined like."

"Hm! Did you see his back?"

"I don't know. I shut the door hard. I was all scared like because I thought he was coming in."

"Did he shake his fist?"

"I don't think so, but he spoke ever so angry."

"Now just one last question. When you were looking at this man and when you were listening to him, did you ever have the least idea that he might be Mr. Frank Richleigh?"

The idea was so absurd that she actually smiled. Franklin cut in with a quick guess. "But you thought the man was Mr. Harold Richleigh! And they're the same height, aren't they?"

"No, but Mr. Frank, he's all different."

But wherein the difference lay she was unable to explain. Franklin concluded they were the same build but had little facial resemblance and there he had to leave it. But before he left the cottage he was careful to assure his future position, not only by the sincerity of his thanks but by the assurance that as far as he was concerned, the visit should be as secret as the grave. After all, he couldn't tell when he might have to make use of Adams again.

On the top of the homeward bus he reviewed his morning's work and failed to find it good. Of course a good deal depended upon the amount of reliance that could be placed on Adams as a witness. Still, taking her at her best value, things had got no further forward. According to her, the caller of the Wednesday evening had not been either Frank Richleigh or the T. W. R. as pictured by the Press. But that did not say definitely that Frank Richleigh was *not* the caller. It was suspicious for instance, that he had arrived at that birthday dinner the last of the four, or say the three, brothers. He had had nobody to meet and had only to come direct from town.

And there was another important thing. If Frank Richleigh were the caller, it must have been either as a practical joke or with some sinister motive; the laying for instance of that false trail of which the culminating episode was the T. W. R. letter. What he would do then would be to go to Muffley Hill Grammar School and make a few inquiries into the life and character of Frank Richleigh and find out if possible where he had been on that Wednesday night. Further, he would find out where he had been staying since his summer holidays and inquire there as to his movements. All sorts of things might be brought to light.

But that evening something unexpected happened. Potter returned a day before he was due and brought various bits of news with him. Harold Richleigh had thrown up his job and announced his intention of quitting the profession forthwith. He was not to be found at his rooms and at the railway station he had not been noticed. Where he had raised the wind nobody knew, but gone he had, and the manager left to blaspheme at his leisure. Further, that job at Norwich was the first he had done since the beginning of September, when a tour of the East Coast resorts had come to an end. It was proved by the mouths of many witnesses that he had been in town most of that period. He had been seen in the "Eagle" in Coventry St. on the first and the third of October. The address of his rooms in town was—7 Harries Rd., Pimlico.

Potter had thereupon pushed off to Little Martens. There he had an easy case. The vicar had been in his parish till the Wednesday morning and had caught the train which would land him in

THE PERFECT MURDER CASE

Liverpool St. at the time his niece had stated. As for gossip, there were people in the parish who thought him stand-offish; his wife however had an excellent name. He had already mentioned that he hoped in the near future to replace the pony trap by a small car. Potter had also secured photos of both the brothers; Charles from a village cricket group and his brother from a theatrical advertisement.

"Thundering good work, Potter!" said Franklin and promptly the pair of them went into the question of how to pick up the traces of the missing actor. Asked to suggest his own assistant for the job, Potter named a good man he could get and was authorised to fix him up.

The next thing was to arrange for the photos of the brothers to be enlarged and for three copies of each to be printed. Later, at his rooms, he found a message from Eaton, a hastily scribbled note.

F. R o/k as expected. See you in a day or two. Expect developments *re* window. S there this afternoon.

T. E.

P.S.—I damn near signed it "Marius."

CHAPTER XII

FRANKLIN IS EXCEEDINGLY BUSY

(A)

THE only aid that Franklin had in timing his visit to Muffley Hill Grammar School was the recollection of his own school hours. He assumed the morning interval would be taken round about 10.30. The secretary who answered the bell let fall that he was ten minutes early. Mr. Richleigh, she said, was absent on a holiday and she did not know his whereabouts. His rooms were at 12 Station Road, but rumour said he had vacated these at the end of the summer term. However, if the caller cared to wait till the morning interval, somebody in the Common Room might give him the information he needed.

As it happened a couple of masters off duty were already in the Common Room. Franklin apologised for his intrusion but said he was looking up Richleigh whom he had not seen for a very long while and who, he was disappointed to learn, was away from the school. Did anybody by any chance know his present address?

They were quite a friendly pair and drew him up a chair by the fire. "Who was it had Richleigh's address, Purcell? Walton, wasn't it?"

"Hanged if I know," said Purcell. "If you don't mind waiting — (Franklin's my name) — Mr. Franklin, the other men'll be down in a minute. You knew Richleigh pretty well?"

"Fairly well," prevaricated the other.

"Played cricket with him I expect."

"He still plays a good game?" parried Franklin.

"Oh rather; jolly useful man to have on one's side. Rotten business about his uncle?"

"Oh that *was* his uncle. I thought the name was familiar."

"Oh yes; that was his uncle all right. Pretty awful outsider by all accounts. I never heard Richleigh mention him, did you, Burton?"

"He was a secretive sort of bloke," said Burton.

"But an awfully clever chap, don't you think?" suggested Franklin.

Purcell flashed a glance at his colleague. The look seemed to be a warning, but Burton didn't quite catch it. "A very original sort of chap. Rather too highbrow for this sort of work. Shouldn't be surprised if he never comes back." He turned to the other. "Lay you evens, Purcell, that Richleigh doesn't come back."

"Even what? Bobs if you like."

But the bet was never registered. Somewhere a bell rang and a pattering of feet was heard. In a minute it became a rush as the forms hurtled down the stairs. Then the Common Room door opened and the staff trickled in. Franklin stood up and drew back from the fire.

"Don't move, Mr. Franklin," said Purcell. "There's plenty of room for everybody. Here's the chap we're waiting for. Oh Walton," and he raised his voice by way of general introduction, "this is Mr. Franklin, a friend of Richleigh's. Have you got his address by any chance?"

"How do you do, Mr. Franklin," said Walton,

FRANKLIN IS EXCEEDINGLY BUSY
a man in the early forties. "Which address did you want? I'm afraid I haven't got his French one."

"French?" remarked Franklin. "What's he doing in that galley?"

"Oh, just globe-trotting," laughed the other. "We rather guessed he was going on to Marseilles and then to Algiers. He's hot stuff on Arabic. Had a Gippo here last term, showing him over the school." He paused for a moment, then, "Curious sort of chap, Richleigh!" And then again, fearing perhaps the dropping of a brick, "And a damn good chap, in many ways." But Franklin noted the tone of the addition.

"I have the address of his rooms," said Franklin, "but I believe he left there in July."

"That's right. I believe he spent some of his time in the country with his brother—you know him perhaps; the parson—and then he came to town for a bit. The Danvers Hotel in Southampton Row. I saw him there the beginning of term and he told me he was staying on till he went to France. For all I know he may be there now."

"Well, I'm awfully grateful to you," said Franklin. "I'll run along and make sure. Please don't trouble to come out."

"Oh, that's all right," said Walton. "I want a breath of fresh air. Perfectly poisonous atmosphere you get in these Common Rooms."

But it was not until they got outside the main gate that Walton unburdened his soul. "Are you a close friend of Richleigh's, Mr. Franklin? You don't mind my asking?"

"Not in the least," was the reply. "To be per-

fectly candid, you can say what you like about Richleigh in front of me."

"Well then; when you said you'd see him next term, you can take it from me it won't be here. The old man's rather had his knife into him lately and he's most unpopular with the men——"

"Surely not!" interrupted the other.

"It isn't all his fault I grant you. Richleigh happens to have a small amount of private means; he's a damn sight more of a gentleman than some we've got here, and he used to keep himself to himself: three unpardonable crimes in our profession Mr. Franklin. He and the rest of the staff rarely used to speak to each other, though he always got on well with the boys. If I might use a hack expression, I should call Richleigh soured by experience. He had a tongue like vitriol."

"How did you get on with him yourself?"

"Quite well. I think I was the only one he ever cottoned to and he didn't tell me very much. Then there's been this scandal about his uncle and I happen to know the old man has made up his mind to ask him to send in his resignation."

"I don't hold any brief for Richleigh," said Franklin, "but surely that's pretty damnable. If he liked to fight the case wouldn't the old man, as you call him, find himself in queer street?"

"There are more ways of killing a cat than hitting it on the head," said Walton enigmatically. Then he gave a squint round to see if anybody was in sight. "Headmasters are strange beings. I'll give you an example. The old man smokes perfectly poisonous tobacco and Richleigh remarked in the Common Room—rather clever I thought it

—that he was the man who put the ‘g’ in Dunhill. Somebody made it his business to tell the Head and he gave Richleigh the hell of a ticking off.”

“I’d rather like to meet your Head,” said Franklin. “He sounds interesting.”

“Oh damnably!” said Walton. “Well, you know your way; straight down the hill. Remember me to Richleigh if you see him and give him the straight tip about the old man.”

“Some band of brothers!” thought Franklin as he strode down the hill. In two minutes he was knocking at the door of No. 12 Station Road. The door was opened by an elderly woman.

“Is Mr. Richleigh in?”

“Oh no! He left last July and took all his things with him. Did you want to see the rooms?”

“I’m afraid I don’t; thank you very much. You don’t know his address by any chance?”

“I don’t know where he is, but I always send on any letters to his brother at Enfield.”

“Well, it’s an awful pity I missed him. He was with you quite a long time, wasn’t he?”

“Just over five years. He *was* such a nice gentleman to have in the house. He gave me this picture when he went away,” and she drew back to point out a water colour that hung just inside the hall door. “We *were* sorry to lose him.”

“I expect you were,” said Franklin, running his eye over the really fine bit of colour work. “That’s the school, isn’t it?”

“Yes; he did that himself. From the cricket field,” and she ran over it an appraising eye of her own.

"You haven't got a photograph of him that you could spare?"

"Well, not by himself, but he left a lot of old groups behind when he left."

"The very thing!" Franklin reassured her, and in a minute or two had selected what looked like a really good picture.

And there ended the first objective and on the journey back to town Franklin had quite a lot to think about. That chap Richleigh must have been quite an extraordinary bird. Why did he leave his rooms if he had the intention of coming back? Surely not to save a paltry retaining fee. Or had he a pretty shrewd suspicion of how things stood at the school? Still, all that could be attended to later. The great thing was to get on with the next step.

What he was getting at was in a way very simple, though as a solution, rather melodramatic. Frank Richleigh, as he had just learned, had stayed at the Danvers Hotel. Only a few yards away was the Constable. Why should he not have played truant for a night or two and left the Danvers for the Constable, there to pass himself off as T. W. Richards? Moreover Franklin proposed to find out at what time Richleigh had left the hotel on that Wednesday night. If he had left early, say with ample time to get to Enfield by six thirty, then he might also have been the caller of that evening.

The immediate question was, which hotel was it better to begin with? And the Constable, being next door to the Tube station, got it.

(B)

When Franklin was shown into the office of the manageress of the Constable Hotel, he was rather surprised to see how young she was. "I was going to say, 'Are you the manageress?'" he began.

She smiled. "What is it you want to sell me?"

He looked confused for once. "I'm sorry. At least it's like this. I expect you've been worried to death by the police but I want to worry you again. I represent a particularly interested party and I'm after information about the T. W. Richards who stayed here from the 1st to the 3rd. He registered in the usual way?"

"Yes."

"Did he actually sleep in the hotel?"

"As far as we know he did. There's no rule that a chambermaid should report in the morning whether a bed has been slept in or not. He had breakfast here each morning. You can take that as certain."

"Could I see the chambermaid?"

"There's no need. I was present when a Scotland Yard detective questioned her in this very office. She either didn't remember or else noticed nothing unusual."

"At what time were the breakfasts?"

"Impossible to say. There are four hundred breakfasts in this hotel every day."

"Any other meals?"

"None; and no extras."

"Well, I'm very grateful to you," said Franklin, preparing to go. "Could I speak to the porter on duty? Would you mind?"

"The one you want is not on duty but I can tell you all you want. I think I know it all by heart."

"There's only one last thing," said Franklin when she'd finished. "Could a person pop in and out of here—say to write a letter—without being detected. I mean of course if he were a stranger?"

"Frankly, I think he could," was the reply.

Franklin thanked her and hurried away to the next objective. This time it was a manager whom he approached.

"May I have a word with you in confidence? I'm a detective and want to ask about a guest who recently left."

"By all means," was the reply. "But of course the answers will depend on the nature of the information you want."

"I recognise that," said Franklin. "If there's anything you don't feel like answering, just say so point blank. It's about a Mr. Richleigh who was here a few days ago."

"Richleigh?" The name seemed familiar. "When did he leave?"

"On the 5th or about that date."

"Just a minute," said the manager and went to the hall desk. When he came back he had the statement in his hand. "Here we are. August 28th to October 5th, inclusive," and he handed it to Franklin.

"I see Mr. Richleigh was here from the 1st of this month to the 3rd. Is there any means of finding out if he actually slept here on those dates?"

The manager was on his dignity at once. "None whatever. It is no concern of the management

whether a guest actually occupies the room he pays for. If we started enquiries of that sort we might get ourselves into serious trouble."

"And quite right too. I just wondered; that's all. The dates are frightfully important."

"Just wait a minute," said the manager. The wait was nearly ten, but worth it. "You can take it for certain that Mr. Richleigh *was* in his room on those nights. By the way, is he anything to do with this murder case?"

"Hallo!" thought Franklin. "Somebody's jogged his memory." Then aloud, "Well, he is and he isn't. He's a relative and left England long before the murder. Would you mind if I spoke to the hall porter? I'd rather like to know something about his leaving."

"Turpin!" called the manager. "Just come a minute. Do you remember a Mr. Richleigh who stayed here all September and left on the 10th of this month? No. 277."

"Youngish man, about my height, used to go to all the cricket matches when he came."

"Turpin's a marvel for faces and numbers," said the manager.

"I suppose this isn't him," said Franklin, pointing out the photo of T. W. who was constructed by the Sunday paper.

"No sir," was the instant reply. "That isn't him."

"Is he on this cricket group then?"

The porter found him like a shot. "This is him sir. The one sitting down in the middle."

"And when exactly did he leave?"

"On the 5th sir, and he gave me half a quid.

THE PERFECT MURDER CASE

He and I used to talk quite a lot about cricket sir."

"Any idea where he was going?"

"Going to France sir; where I copped my packet!"

"Just one more question. The Wednesday night before he left he went to his brother's at Enfield to attend a party. Do you happen to know for certain what time he left here?"

The porter thought for a second or two, then, "Yes sir. He left here pretty late. I remember it now sir; on the Wednesday night like you said. Mr. Richleigh he said to me, "Get me a taxi George and make it snappy. I'm due at Enfield at a quarter to thirty," he said, "and it's past that now."

"And was it?"

"Just on seven sir."

Franklin slipped him his tip, thanked the manager and departed. Outside the hotel he looked at his watch. A bit of lunch on the spot or at Durango House? He decided on the latter and boarded a bus. But no sooner had he set foot in the entrance when Grigson, the senior commissioner spotted him.

"Excuse me sir, but there's an urgent message for you in the hall office."

The message was from Potter.

Come "Eagle" at once. Am holding H. R.

W. R. P.

Ten minutes later, lunch forgotten, Franklin was entering the saloon bar of the hotel.

(c)

In the corner of the lounge sat the two, Potter busy on a plate of sandwiches and at his elbow a Guinness. Opposite him, full face to the bar, was a man who at the distance of thirty feet looked like a hard-bitten man of the world: a trifle shop-soiled perhaps but still presentable. His waistcoat was unbuttoned and his bowler was tilted to the back of his head. His face was a brick red but a nearer view showed its puffiness and the bagginess under the eyes. Yet it was the face of one who could still assume and demand a certain respect. So much and more Franklin noted as he moved along, as if in search of a friend. Then he caught Potter's eye.

The latter stood up, his face beaming with surprised happiness. "Well if it ain't old George! Put it there my boy! Where did you spring from?"

Franklin showed equal pleasure. "Well I'm damned it it isn't old Tom. Well this is a treat. What are you going to have? Hi, waiter! Now then. What is it?"

"Just a minute," said Potter. "Meet my friend, Mr. Richleigh."

Richleigh waved his hand and then staggered to his feet. With both hands on the table he bowed solemnly. "Pleased to meet you, er, George. Richleigh, that's me; Richleigh. You have this one with me."

"No, no, no!" protested Franklin. "Pleased to meet you, Mr. Richleigh, but this one's on me."

So the drinks were ordered and the three sat down. Potter finished off his half emptied glass.

this is what happened, if I was on my dying bed. It was on a Wednesday and not many in the shop and I'd run out of wool so I slipped up the stairs to get a fresh tin off the landing and then I heard the manager coming up the stairs. 'What are you doing here?' he says and I told him. 'You keep down in the shop,' he says. 'Too much money laying about in that room.' 'What do you mean?' I says. 'You know what I mean,' he says and then I told him what I thought of him. 'That's enough of your lip,' he says. 'You can pack up and go on Saturday.' 'You go to hell,' I says. 'I'm going now and you'll hear more about this,' and I put on my things and walked out of the shop and I haven't been there since."

"Sounds a pretty low trick," said Franklin. "What was the idea? Jealous or got a grudge against you?"

Stroke lowered his voice to a whisper. "Old Richleigh put him up to it. They meant to have me out one way or another." He felt in his pocket and found a letter. "You read that!"

122 The Grove,

N.22

27/9/3-

Dear Miss Mallow,

I do not think you understand just what I wanted you to do. If you do not accept a chance of bettering yourself you will be very foolish. I would like you to come and see me at the above address on Thursday next, at about 7.0 p.m. would do. You can take it from me that you will

be very much an enemy to yourself if you miss such a chance. There is money in it and money is always useful.

I shall expect you without fail on Thursday.

Your sincere friend,
T. T. RICHLEIGH.

"You see his little scheme?"

"I think I do," replied Franklin. "Who is this Miss Mallow?"

"My girl; the one I'm walking out with. Known each other for years, ever since we were kids. He saw her round at the other shop one night and got a bit fresh. Then he raised her ten bob a week and got her to stay late one Wednesday but she wasn't having any. Then she told me all about it and showed me this letter and she and I put our heads together and she writ him an answer and she didn't half tell him off. Then she got the sack."

"I say; that was pretty low-down. She got a new job?"

"Not half she hasn't!"

"And what did *you* do about it? You surely didn't sit down under a thing like that?"

"What did I do? Well, it was an afternoon off in any case so I talked it over with Lil and then I went to see a lawyer what her sister's typewriter for and he told me to come and see him again and keep my mouth shut and he'd see what he could do. I wasn't half mad. Then I thought I'd go and have it out with the old swine himself but——"

Franklin gave a start. "That would be on Wednesday the 3rd?"

"That's right. That's when it was. As I was say-

ing I went to have it out with the wicked old devil but he wasn't in. I ought to have known that."

"Why?"

"That's the day he comes to the shop to collect his money. But I was that mad I clean forgot all about it till the girl at the door said he was out and then it dawned on me."

"Would that be about seven o'clock?"

"You mean when I went round to the house? Yes; just about seven I should think."

"And do you always wear your glasses?"

"I'd be as blind as a bat without them," was the reply. "Gas done that; in the war."

When Franklin got outside that shop it didn't take him long to make up his mind what to do. There was no need to interview the manager about that will. Scotland Yard would have done all that. Much better see the 'General' and try to exchange the information he had just acquired and which would almost certainly be news to the Yard, for information about the will and any other crumbs which might fall from the great man's table. Not that it was a nice job to undertake. At headquarters he had no official standing and there was no reason why he should be given preferential treatment. And it would depend too on what sort of a mood the 'General' was in.

But when he thought of that wasted Sunday morning and the evidence he had wrung so laboriously from Adams, he felt like twisting her neck. The voice for instance, that had been "sort of refined like." But the fault had been his for expecting from that cheap little hussy anything that required intelligence. Later he was to learn that

lack of the things he expected could prove for Mary Adams a really profitable business.

(B)

Wharton was in, so Franklin learned, but interviewing a man who had arrived half an hour previously with an urgent request to see him. But he had no more than five minutes in which to kick his heels before he was shown into the room. The superintendent was alone and writing at his desk; something important too, for he didn't even look up with giving his quiet, "Take a seat, Franklin, will you."

In a couple of minutes he finished his writing. Then he rose, pulled out his pipe and drew a chair up. "Five minutes if I'm hanged for it. Now my boy; what's your trouble?"

Somehow Franklin's prepared speeches went by the board, "Well sir, it's difficult to say. But I think I've run across some information that might be useful and I've come to turn it over."

Wharton paused in the act of lighting his pipe and turned his eyes with sudden interest on the caller. His tone became brusque and official. "What sort of information?"

"I've discovered who the man was who came to see Thomas Richleigh on the night of October the 3rd."

Wharton preserved his poker face but the tone of his, "And who was it?" admitted that the information would be news. Franklin told him and in detail. Wharton was interested and when the dénouement came, considerably surprised.

"Well, I'm very much obliged to you. And about that will business you were mentioning, you can take it from me that there never was one. You've saved me some work and I'll save you some." Then he struck another match and got the pipe going well. Franklin guessed that something was coming and there was.

"Now then, young man; there's one or two things *I* want to ask *you*. And I want to know them pretty bad. We'll start at the beginning. Why didn't you come back to the Yard?"

Franklin sat with his elbows on his knees, his hat swinging idly in his hand, but his eyes never left the other's face. "Several reasons sir; health for one. If I'd come back I could never have stuck it; perhaps a night or two with no sleep and meals at all hours. Then I got the offer of private work where I could be my own master. Just what it is I'm not at liberty to say——"

"You needn't," interrupted Wharton. "I know!"

"I expect you do sir, but I'm not at liberty to disclose it."

"Well, I hope you'll make good," said Wharton more kindly. "I thought a good deal of you, young man, and I always said you'd end up higher than I shall. Still, you've got you own welfare to consider."

"You may think me impertinent to say so but I'd give up a good deal rather than lose your good opinion."

"While you do what I expect of every man, that is go straight," said Wharton seriously, "you'll never lose that. But don't you think you've given cause for suspicion? You've been round here

two or three times, you were at the inquest, you had permission to visit the house and now you come round with information. Is that so or is it not?"

"I grant your side of the case sir, but you ought to take my word for one thing. As soon as you got back from France I tried to see you and I've been trying ever since. And as soon as I saw you I intended to tell you what I've just told you."

That was the last of the frown on the 'General's' face. "That's settled then. But I'll tell you one thing, young man. If I'd really thought all the things I hinted at you'd have gone away with a flea in your ear. Now then. What are you so anxious for me to tell you?"

Franklin hardly knew how to answer that *riposte*. "Well sir; I really don't want anything, but if you answered one question it might help a good deal. Was there anything the least suspicious about that French alibi?"

"Nothing. It was bombproof!"

"Thank you sir," said Franklin and rose to go. But the other had not yet finished.

"Before you go I want you to understand the position. You have an interest in this case. But the law can take no notice of you although it can be grateful for your, and anybody's else's, help. To be frank, the law can do without you except as a helper. It will take no official notice of you and will never admit that information has to be purchased. But if you give information, like any other citizen, you will be thanked. Is that perfectly clear?"

"Perfectly sir. Discipline is discipline."

"That's all right then," and he held out his hand. At the door however he had a surprise ready.

"I shall be at the Primrose Tea Rooms in the Haymarket at about four. If John Franklin happens to turn up I might be glad to see him."

As he went along the Strand Franklin felt like a grubby urchin whose head has been patted by the captain of the eleven. If he had had a tail he would have wagged it. By a quarter to four he was outside the shop and watching both entrances. Prompt to time Wharton arrived, looking like a benevolent city man who can afford to take things easy rather than the one who had been hard at it for days. Franklin saw him seated and then joined him.

The last five minutes produced the excitement.

"Curious how things happen," said Wharton. "You've seen from the papers that we've been anxious to get into touch with a T. W. Richards. This afternoon I was puzzling my head about him when the door opened and a voice said, 'Will you speak to a Mr. Richards?' Would I not! And there he was, large as life. Glass and china buyer from Hone's of Manchester; just taken over the job, was recommended by a friend to put up at the Constable Hotel. Spent a day or two in London looking over the wholesale houses and then on the morning of the 4th, told the hall-porter he was going to Liverpool Street. So he was but only to meet his brother-in-law. The two went to Victoria and ultimately to Vienna where Richards did more buying and between ourselves had a pretty hectic time. Then the first thing he saw in his paper was that the police were anxious to get in touch with him, so along he comes to find out why. He was shown a certain letter but knew no more, and probably less, about it than you or I."

"An interesting thing would be," suggested Franklin, "to find out if any engaging stranger got into conversation with Richards and learned his plans; and above all if Mr. Richards could describe that stranger."

"As you say," agreed Wharton. "Unhappily Mr. Richards doesn't recall any such talk except at the Coliseum one night with a rather nice old gentleman with white whiskers." And with that he rose and reached for his hat.

Franklin rose too and motioned to the waitress. "No, no!" expostulated Wharton. "This is my show. One bill, please." Then he held out his hand. "Good-bye, my boy. Don't work too hard. Come and see me when you're not too busy."

Franklin began to speak but the other smothered his thanks. He leaned forward and whispered in his ear, "You run on. I've got a little job of work here. Got to see if the whiskers were real!"

Franklin left the teashop strangely chastened and subdued. No more information then from the Yard. But what a thundering good sort the old General was. One of the best and straight as a gun barrel. A sudden glow of feeling swept over him as he thought of all the happenings of that afternoon.

And then later came the inevitable question; what was now to be done? All the side issues seemed to have been cleared away and the stage would soon be bare of the former suspects who played there a brief part. But new characters must be found, and from where? And after an hour's hard thinking there seemed to be one answer only.

The earlier years of Richleigh's life about which

THE PERFECT MURDER CASE

Burren had told him; that period when he had disappeared entirely; why not try to see what had happened then? In those hidden years there might be material for a dozen tragedies. And after all, if one had to start all over again, that start had to be made somewhere.

CHAPTER XIV

SCOTLAND YARD IS ALSO BUSY

(A)

WHEN Franklin made up his mind to set about unearthing the facts concerning the earlier life of Thomas Richleigh, he hardly estimated the enormous difficulties involved. His state of mind at the time was an optimistic one. Things had not gone so badly, considering everything, and the meeting with Wharton was further responsible for an outlook that took insufficient notice both of the means at his disposal and of the scarcity of clues. Richleigh had succeeded in keeping so completely to himself the happenings of those earlier years that nobody had the least idea how or where he had spent them. To Mrs. Cardon and her predecessor he had said nothing and had let nothing escape him. As to the facilities for the search and the time available, where Franklin could employ a minute the Yard spent an hour. They had moreover means and methods of approach that were wholly out of his reach.

During the weeks that followed the murder, the authorities as will be seen, were exceedingly active, and they had to be. There were plenty of people who wanted to know what the police were doing and why they didn't earn their living. The case had

been so challenging that it was felt the police should rise to it and the occasion. Those who had felt it incumbent on them to stand by Scotland Yard as the equal of any criminal investigation department in the world were having their patience sorely tried. Those who had disabled the benefits of their own country were annoyingly triumphant.

In those early days when nothing in particular was happening, the case was in the nature of a wind-fall and for some time the columns of the Press were filled. There were the private investigations of certain papers, the glut of pictures, the trails that opened suddenly and as speedily were closed, the interviews, the anonymous letters and their false alarms, the rumours and—the rewards. The *Record* offered £500 for information that would lead to a conviction and the *Wire* outbid it by another £500. And then the nine days' wonder came slowly to an end. The columns became fewer, reduced themselves to paragraphs, became intermittent and finally the great case rumbled faintly like the scant reverberations of very distant drums.

Then there came to light the presumed escape from the window and again there were columns and pictures and stories of notable and baffling escapes. Then it all died away again. Then something else happened. Mary Adams was engaged within a week of the tragedy to play the housemaid in the Schwinder Bros.' Film, "When the Cat's Away." It must be confessed that she made a good job of it, thanks to a certain low-comedy perkiness and the genius of the producer. Be that as it may, the publicity agent saw to it on the film's completion that the public should recall the name of

Mary Adams. This spasmodic and casual revival was almost the last.

By the end of December it was barely a memory and then certain things happened. Of these one only need be mentioned. James Steward died of pneumonia, a chill which he caught in his garden carrying him off in three days. A statement was made and promptly denied, that worry over the Richleigh affair had hastened his end. In any event, the death of a man even remotely connected with the tragedy, was a cause of revival of interest.

During all these weeks however, the last thing the public really knew was what the police were actually doing. It was because the inquiry was largely local and subterranean that the thoughtless or garrulous inferred that nothing was being done at all. It might be interesting to see therefore, without any nice estimation of reasons, exactly what Superintendent Wharton directed and accomplished. It was always said of him that he resolutely refrained from being clever; in the conduct of this case it must be admitted that he succeeded in being thorough. Part of this ground it should be stated, particularly that which concerned Thomas Richleigh, was covered by Franklin.

(B)

At first sight the Perfect Murder Case seemed to abound in clues but somehow, when one came to get to grips with them, they produced nothing in themselves. All that arose out of them was the increasing certainty that the murderer had planned

with rare foresight. Take the parcel. Paper, label, string and contents were of everyday type. Silk stockings are a handy present and the average male need not be embarrassed at their purchase. The result of inquiries produced therefore such a multiplicity of replies that a lifetime would have been insufficient to follow them up. So with the knife. It was not new and it was not old and its maker turned out thousands like it every year. The purchase of the catgut which had been used in the escape from the window? Impossible, when thousands of strings are daily sold over the counters of music shops. And it was found to be equally hopeless to trace out the ownership of typewriters of the make used by the writer of the "Marius" letters.

As for the scene of the crime it was gone over like a doubtful Old Master. Every inch was searched for prints and the garden and its paths hunted over for a dropped clue. Occupants of all houses in The Grove were questioned as to their movements on that night, in the hope that somebody might have seen either the murderer's entrance or his escape. The local police were questioned in the same way, as were the owners of those houses in Maple Terrace whose gardens ran down to the back of The Grove. Tradesmen were questioned as to deliveries made in the street during that evening; a fairly hopeless business as it had been early-closing day. The booking clerks on duty at the local stations proved equally bruised reeds.

The matter of the shutters was gone into in great detail. Those at Little Martens Vicarage had been there as long as anybody could remember.

Those at The Grove had been put in by a local tradesman to Richleigh's specifications; why nobody knew, unless it were for reasons of sentiment or a horror of being overlooked. Charles Richleigh could recall nobody who had ever experimented on his windows, nor could the maids or their predecessors for years back.

Then came the dossiers and with them some interesting disclosures. Life for Thomas Taylor Richleigh had been a sordid business. Thanks to an examination of fingerprints the police had been presented with a magnificent clue and a starting point, and had found it fairly easy to fit in the grimy pieces of the puzzle that had been his life.

After leaving Cambridge he had changed his name to Thomas Taylor. In the year 1883 he had joined the army, understating his age, and had ultimately reached the rank of colour-sergeant. On his regiment's receiving orders to embark for South Africa in 1900 he deserted and certain monies of the sergeants' mess went with him. In 1902, under the name of Richard Thomas, he was convicted of blackmail. On leaving prison, his return to respectability and his relatives began with the purchase, in partnership with a certain Hermann Lewin, of a billiard hall in Tottenham, the growing of a beard and the resumption of his own name. The rest of his history the reader has heard.

But as far as helping the case was concerned, all this proved a waste of time. The officer whose life he had ruined in that blackmail affair died abroad in 1905 and there was, as far as could be ascertained, no enemy whose rancour might have persisted to the time of the murder. His relationships

with the late Hermann Lewin were perfectly satisfactory. Two other lines of research were speedily closed. Examination of Richleigh's accounts produced no evidence that he in his turn had been blackmailed. His marriage was moreover a myth and had probably been an invention of his own as a sort of cheap acquisition of respectability.

The dossier of Mary Adams proved to be such an innocuous affair that it is not worth quoting. The worst that any of her previous employers could say about her was that she was impertinent and flighty.

But that of Rose Cardon, *née* Barns, was far different. Life at No. 122 The Grove must have been for her a placid and lucrative business. That stream of infantile sentiment which had been printed as the story of her life was founded on fact. What it had told was in the main true; what it diplomatically neglected was much more interesting. The "life-long connection with hotel-life" for instance was not incorrect—her father had been a brewer's drayman. For herself, beginning as general help, she had risen to the position of barmaid. She had kept her job—at the *Three Acres*, Edmonton—after the death of her husband till within eighteen months of chrystalising into a housekeeper. In that time something happened which led to much. In the Maternity Hospital, Hampstead Road, she gave birth to a daughter which died a few hours later. The father was Joseph Purland, a hairdresser of Tottenham and three months after the affair he left the neighbourhood.

It was undoubtedly during inquiries about him

that Cardon had come into contact with Richleigh, at that time a bit weather-beaten but still hale and hearty. The advertised salary had been £40, all found. As however at the date of the murder she had no less than £400 in Savings Certificates alone, the rest of the history of Richleigh's housekeeper need not be related.

Again, the predecessor of Cardon. She was still living in the village to which she had retired on the death of her father. She had no grudge against Richleigh and no relatives. She seemed a bovine, colourless sort of person who received her monthly allowance as something normal and wholly uneventful. The village knew her as a widow and her son was still at school.

The affair of the will had proved a dead end, at least the advertisement produced no witnesses. Had a solicitor drawn one up and found the witnesses from his office, he must have been made aware of the death of his client and have come forward with evidence or produced the will to the executors. It had been assumed therefore that Richleigh had died intestate. Ernest, doubtless as the result of a family conclave, had applied for letters of administration and had ultimately been granted the necessary powers.

There still remained two possible sources of information. An enormous amount of local gossip was collected and sifted. Every person known to have come into contact with the dead man—tradesmen, employees, gardener, maids, bank manager—was questioned. But there emerged nothing except the confirmation of Richleigh as a pig-headed, truculent and not over-scrupulous man.

There had also been the forged T. W. R. letter and the attempt to trace all the people to whom Richards had told his business. Of these the white-bearded gentleman who had later taken tea in those rooms in the Haymarket, seemed the most promising. But he had been rather deaf and as Richards admitted that their Coliseum conversation had been more in the nature of a broadcast, there was no telling who had listened in. And as for any clue afforded by the hotel paper, Wharton proved for himself that in half a dozen hotels one could enter lounge or smoke room unchallenged and write letters with as much security as if one were a director.

Then there were the letters, particularly the first. Because some part of the statements of Marius had proved true that was no reason to believe the rest reliable. The likelihood was all the other way. No man would be such a fool as to put his neck too far into the noose. Probably the first trick acquired by any Stone Age schemer was to give his enemy certain truths so that he should not regard the balance as lies. Yet Wharton took a good number of opinions on that letter, from men of the world, sportsmen, psychopaths, neuropaths and even the man in the street. All came up against the one stumbling block, "*If the letter is true. . .*" Wharton got to believe with the jester that there is much virtue in "*if.*"

Before the case was definitely put aside one last desperate trail was followed; desperate because it was as certain as anything in this world can be, that the letter from the pseudo-South-African-nephew was a flagrant forgery. The T. W. R. was

an exact copy of Richards' initials and there had never been another T. W. R. in the hotel. In spite of all this Wharton took a chance. But though the Cape authorities made an inquiry as minute as he could ever have expected, nothing arose to prove that Peter Richleigh had ever married or had been the father of an illegitimate son.

But though the case was set aside it was not abandoned. From time to time as they suggested themselves, minor inquiries were made. At any moment too, something might turn up; some loose thread from another case give a labyrinthine clue, or some unguarded word or peculiarity of conduct call attention. But as far as Superintendent Wharton was concerned, the case seemed to be over and Abnett took over the remains. Did I say, "Took over"? That is hardly correct. He was about to take them over when something did happen.

Just what that was is a long story and if not an incredible one, one at least that would strain credulity were not its individual happenings veritable beyond all question.

CHAPTER XV

DOUBTING CASTLE

IT was in November that Franklin spent with Ludovic Travers an evening which was to be, as far as concerned the happenings that arose out of it, the most momentous of his career. He had been looking forward to the conversation as a relaxation, after too much of his own company and a tendency to become introspective, but it is doubtful if he anticipated in the least, even when he left the flat, the importance of what had been said.

"How are things coming along now?" Travers had inquired.

"Slowly," was the reply. "Nothing for days but trying to get back into Thomas Richleigh's life. I've had two men hunting Tottenham and Woodmore Hill for gossip and Potter and I have got as far as when he first arrived in Tottenham and I'm hanged if we can get any further."

"And how are Scotland Yard getting on?"

"No better. At least if they had found out anything we should have heard something."

"Don't think I'm trying to hinder," said Travers, "but just what are you hoping to find in Richleigh's dossier? An enemy who'd found him out or what?"

"To be perfectly frank, I don't know. I'm just expecting something to turn up."

"It's frightful cheek of me," said Travers, "bothering you like this. When I was a boy I was once taken over a famous racing stable and had all the horses pointed out to me. After that for years I used to open the paper always at the sports' page to see what was happening to them or their descendants. That's the way with this case. I pitchforked myself into it and now I'm hanged if my curiosity will let me out of it."

The look of despondency did not clear off Franklin's face as Travers hoped it would. "Of course," he went on, "impatience is all very well for a layman like me. You fellows know results don't come by wishing."

"I wish to God they did," said Franklin. "The thing that's getting me now is the uselessness of it all. Take the old gang of suspects. Somehow one felt at home with them. They didn't commit the murder but they might have done. What I mean is that if I find another suspect, how on earth can he intrigue me like the original ones? Richleigh didn't go out so how can there be a man who fits the case? It seems to me the first qualification of the criminal that he should be somebody known to the maid; somebody who had been in the house recently therefore."

"I wonder if I might put it in another way?" said Travers.

"I read the other day, and perhaps you did, a preface written by Chesterton for a detective novel and in it he said how annoyed he always was if the murderer turned out to be some person whom he had never met before in the story; somebody dragged into the last chapter to explain improba-

bilities, or some relative turning up from abroad. I take it that's what you mean. If the murderer turned out to be some person with whom you weren't well acquainted, you'd feel somehow as if you'd been swindled."

"That's exactly it. Now take those four nephews. The more I think about it the more I think it's a pity one of them is not guilty. If you really think it out, the absolute certainty is that one of them *must* be guilty; but then, what's the use of talking like that?"

"I'm not so sure," said Travers, perfectly seriously. "Suppose we disregard the alibis; which of the four would you name as the murderer?"

"Frank!" replied the other, without the slightest hesitation. "He had the education; he was sufficiently active; he knew the house and the maid knew him; he was a sportsman and his life was one of repression. He was a man who felt he could do better things and yet never had the chance. On the other hand he was regarded by his colleagues as an incompetent. That's why he had such a scathing tongue."

"And the 'Marius' letters gave him his opportunity to make a show. It certainly explains the spectacular side of the whole business. And that reminds me."

He rose from the easy chair and found up a bundle of photographs. "These pictures you sent round. There's one of them. Frank as a matter of fact, I've seen before somewhere. Where I should run up against him heaven knows, but his face is perfectly familiar somehow."

He held it at arm's length and Franklin came and squinted over his shoulder. "Funny, isn't it? Something's on the tip of my tongue and for the life of me I can't get it out." He threw the photos on the table. "Still, there we are. It'll pop up some time."

"Very annoying, that sort of thing," said Franklin. "By the way; did I ever tell you Eaton's theory?"

"You didn't, but I'd like to hear it."

If Eaton had been there he would have been pleased with Franklin's presentation. He might have been gratified too at the fact that Travers did not laugh; indeed he seemed to regard it as perfectly feasible.

"Eaton struck me as a most original fellow," he said, "but this is better than ever. Why shouldn't Ernest have been mixed up in the business?"

"Too much to risk and too much money already. Rolling in it."

"And Charles?"

"Plenty of money too; though a bit on the close side. Potter says Eaton's opinion of him was all wrong. He's a rattling good sort and those who've known him since he was a boy say he's the best-living parson they've ever run across."

"Harold then? I suppose by the way he couldn't have been exaggerating the drunk business for purposes of effect?"

"Not he. If he could act like that he'd be a top-liner in town instead of what he is, and if he could make up his face the colour it's acquired, he'd be a consulting expert to the profession. Moreover," and here he couldn't resist a smile, "he was re-

moved yesterday to a private home—for inebriates I fancy—at Hertford.”

Franklin joined in Travers’ roar of laughter. “Pretty good reasons, especially the last.” And then Travers thought the correct moment had come and decided to voice the idea that had been in his mind for a day or two.

“I want to put something up to you. If you’ve got all those ideas about Frank Richleigh without seeing him what might you not have got if you’d seen him and lived with him for a week or two?”

“But what’s the use. He didn’t commit the murder. He’s an impossibility.”

“Damn the impossibilities. Look at it fair and square. Here’s a case of a unique kind. A man of keen intelligence actually announces that he can’t be caught. He flaunts before everybody the assertion that the police can have no chance. And why? Because he’s found out a way to do something which nobody believes possible. He may have found the way to murder a man and not be there or he may have discovered how to be in two places at once. And yet you people will persist in looking for the possible.” Then he smiled. “Pretty cool of me, what? But why not give it a trial? Why not go and see this Frank Richleigh who fits the case so well?”

Franklin was silent for a good few moments. He sat looking into the fire as if seeking in the interplay of the dancing flames some answer to the enigma. Then he shook his head.

“I don’t know what to say. It’s all this time since the thing was done and we’re as far off as ever.”

"True enough. That's why I feel so annoyed that anybody in this twentieth century should continue to propound his homicidal riddle and be so cocksure of getting no answer. That's why I'd give a candle as big as a wireless pole to St. James of Compostello if you could solve it."

"That's very nicely put," said Franklin. "And I'd give a year's salary for a substantial clue."

"There'll be one sooner or later. Infallibility is a mischievous doctrine. Besides, this Marius had too much to say. Like the lady he protested too much. He isn't a superman or even your strong, silent man who does things. There's a yellow streak in him somewhere and an absence of discipline."

Franklin tossed his head. "Frank Richleigh every time."

"Then I'll rub it in again," said Travers. "Go and see him. Get into his company. Give him the chance to make a slip when you're there to see it or hear it."

"I'd love to," said Franklin but his voice sounded hopeless and depressed. "But what's the use? I simply must dig for results. Suppose I presented my accounts for a visit to France on the lines you suggest; wouldn't any auditor who knew the facts strike his pencil through them? If it were my own money I were spending it might be different." His teeth clenched on his pipe and the other noted the determined frown of the brows.

"And if the worst comes to the worst, I'll do that. The murder was done by a human being and, as you said, a fallible one. Sooner or later I'll find the flaw in his defence, if it takes a lifetime."

"That, as we used to say, is the spirit," said

Travers. But he felt that the situation was becoming a little tense. He replenished the other's glass, squirted the siphon and then diplomatically edged the conversation aside.

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Now the first thing that emerged from that evening's talk was the appreciation by Travers of the fact that the case was likely to be a trying one, under his peculiar circumstances, for Franklin. Moreover he lacked that versatility of temperament which might enable him to turn aside from an obsession into some less exacting by-path. If Franklin should begin to take things, or even himself, too seriously, it might be disastrous for him.

That is why he determined to do an unusual thing. He was in the private room of Sir Francis Weston on a certain affair about which his opinion was required and having completed the business in hand, considered the moment a favourable one.

"I hope you won't think it unpardonable of me, Sir Francis, but I'd like to bring a confidential matter to your notice."

"By all means, Travers. What is it?"

"I'll come direct to it because it explains itself. Some time ago you asked me to see Mr. Franklin on a certain matter and since then I've been extremely interested in the particular case in which he's engaged and also in Franklin himself. I have your permission to speak freely, Sir Francis?"

"Do please!" said the other, who was beginning to wonder what it was all about.

"Well, er, Franklin seems to me an exceptionally capable man but very highly strung. Not only that but he's getting the idea that he's expected to produce immediate results; make good as he'd call it, and he looks to me to be heading straight for another breakdown. I ventured to remind him that Scotland Yard was in the same boat as himself. The obvious error about your insisting on results and his impression that expenses were to be cut down to the minimum were hardly—well, were no affair of mine."

"I'm much obliged," said the other, so abruptly that Travers feared at first that he had put a flat foot clean in it. "As a matter of fact I'm exceedingly grateful. I'll see Franklin at once."

"If I might venture to suggest it, Sir Francis, I would like him to think the initiative came from you."

"I think that can be managed. When I saw him the other day he seemed to be perfectly satisfied. Still, we mustn't let an impression of the kind you've been mentioning get about. Results are all very well but I'll never stand for impossibilities being asked or expected of any man," and he picked up the paper-knife and waved it emphatically.

Travers murmured a throaty, "Quite so!" but the other put up a detaining hand. "Tell me as man to man. What's your impression of this case? A long business?"

"For what my opinion is worth, Sir Francis, I should say a very long business. It was an unusual one from the outset."

"Hm! Well, we can stand it. I'm very much

THE PERFECT MURDER CASE

obliged to you, Travers." And then with a touch of his dry humour. "Don't forget to record in your ledger one good deed for the day."

Travers in confusion, clutched his papers and fled.

CHAPTER XVI

FRANKLIN MAKES A FRESH START

As the result of an unexpected interview with the Head of Durangos, Franklin was feeling twice the man he had been and very much on his toes. He had made up his mind to "damn the impossibilities" as Travers had suggested. He would no longer take things at their face value or receive his impressions at second hand. He had seen two of the nephews and now he would see the other two. But because he had considerable respect for Potter's opinion, he decided to leave for the present Charles Richleigh out of it and concentrate on the schoolmaster.

First of all a difficulty or two had to be got over. He knew that at the time of the murder Frank Richleigh had been touring the Aude Valley, starting at Carcassone. Further application to Eaton produced the information that his headquarters had been Quillan. The thing was, was he there still? Probably his brother Ernest was the only person in England who could answer that question, and to apply to him was impossible. Without doubt the lawyer would mention the matter in his next letter and the suspect would be put on his guard. Moreover, since Franklin had no good reason to assign for the request the lawyer would at once become suspicious. To apply to Wharton would also be awkward since it could only be assumed that

Franklin was going to test alibis which Wharton had passed as bombproof. But he did try to get over that difficulty. Potter was sent to Enfield to get by hook or crook an envelope sent by Frank to his brother. It was likely to be difficult since in winter odd paper is made to light fires and not put in dust bins.

Further, to go as an Englishman to so remote a spot would be to arouse suspicions at once. Franklin's French was sound but hardly good enough. Italian on the other hand, thanks to his mother, was his second tongue; the use of which had brought him to the front in the Intelligence Department. He would go as an Italian then, but in what rôle? Ludovic Travers supplied the answer. All that district was full of castles and gorges and cascades. Why not be the advance agent of a Cinema Company, interested in the making of a picture dealing with the exploits of, say, Gaston de Foix? Moreover Travers taught him most of the patter and provided him with a book or two to read up in the train.

But when Franklin arrived in Carcassonne it was with no news of Richleigh's whereabouts. Potter had been unsuccessful. Still, Franklin wasn't worrying. It would be easy enough to pick up the Englishman's trail and not difficult to follow it. And the opportunity was a good one for checking that alibi. At Limoux he tried the first hotel he came to—the right one—and received all the confirmation he wished. Indeed the confirmation was so strong and unanswerable that he made the first entry in his notebook! And that was not to be the last paradoxical entry he was to make before he returned to England.

Couiza told the same story and then came Quillan and the Grand Hotel des Pyrénées. Madame's face brightened at the mention of Mr. Richleigh.

"I'm a friend of his," said Franklin-Vittorini, "and it's most important that I should see him as soon as possible. He's not coming back here I suppose?"

Madame called Maximilien and the two had a machine-gun burst of conversation. It then appeared that Mr. Richleigh had stayed some days in Quillan before going on to Belcaire. In two days he was back, the district proving unfavourable from an artist's point of view. Later he went to Montlouis up on the frontier but that proved too cold and back he came to Quillan. Then he made his final adieux and left for Foix.

Was M. Richleigh still at Foix? Madame did not know. Could M. Vittorini go there that afternoon? Not if he wished to go by bus, he was told. But why not wait till the morning and do the journey in comfort and cheaply, by the auto? Franklin saw the force of the argument. He hoped also to hear a good deal about Richleigh in that hotel where he was evidently so esteemed a guest.

But at Foix the next morning he had an unpleasant surprise. Richleigh had stayed at the Hotel Terminus as the driver had told him but two days before, had left with all his belongings for a destination unknown. At the station however, he was informed that an Englishman with a pronounced accent and dressed as described had taken a ticket for Toulouse. Franklin caught the next train and followed. Inquiries produced the reply that the Englishman had been advised, as he him-

self was, to stay the night in Toulouse and then reserve a place on the rapide for Marseilles.

By this time Franklin was getting annoyed with his Cook's tour across France. He might have been tempted to abandon the chase, since the alibi had received proof as strong as holy writ, had not two things driven him on; a certain obstinacy in his make-up and the ironical solace that at the end of the journey the impossible was waiting to be damned.

At Marseilles it took him two days to discover that Richleigh had left by a slow train for Toulon, after having claimed from the *consigne* a large suitcase. At Toulon however, the luck ran out. Richleigh might have changed his clothes in the train; at any rate there was no news to be picked up about an Englishman who might definitely be said to resemble him. Moreover he was surprised to hear that his fellow countrymen were a long way from uncommon in that part of the world, particularly at the beginning of the Riviera season.

To have searched the Riviera would have taken months, so having secured a room, he made a further attempt to obtain information by sending a long and urgent wire to Ludovic Travers. Two days later he received the reply—

Exact whereabouts unknown. Try Poste Restante Marseilles, Toulon and Hyères.

At the post office there was no letter for Richleigh. The only thing to do therefore was to push on to Hyères, since returning to Marseilles would have meant a longer journey. Having choice of tram or train for the short excursion, he chose the

former and took with him a guide book about the coast. And at the post office he was lucky.

Had they any letters for a M. Richleigh? Yes; there was one. Franklin took it and noticed the Enfield postmark.

"I beg your pardon," he said, handing it back. "This is not the name. I want Ritchley," and he spelt it out.

Next came a visit to the chef-de-police and a display of his credentials. Might he have permission to exercise surveillance at the post office? The references must have been formidable and satisfactory for he received a letter for the postal authorities and the services of a plain clothes agent as a relief during meal hours.

The very first day produced results. He had just returned from lunch and relieved his assistant when all at once he caught the clerk's eye. At the desk was a man; hatless, wearing a brown coat and grey flannel trousers and with face burned to so dark a brown that Franklin scarcely recognised him. He opened the letter at once, read it quickly, smiled once or twice, put it in his breast pocket carefully and then went out with Franklin at his heels.

For some distance Richleigh followed the tram lines; then he turned off down a long avenue. For the next quarter of a mile a bare hundred yards separated them. It looked a certainty that he was making for the station but suddenly, just short of it and at an unseen fork in the road, he stopped and consulted his watch. Then he sat down on a seat that seemed to mark some sort of a bus stop. Franklin pulled down the brim of his hat to give himself a slightly more un-English air, and strolled to the

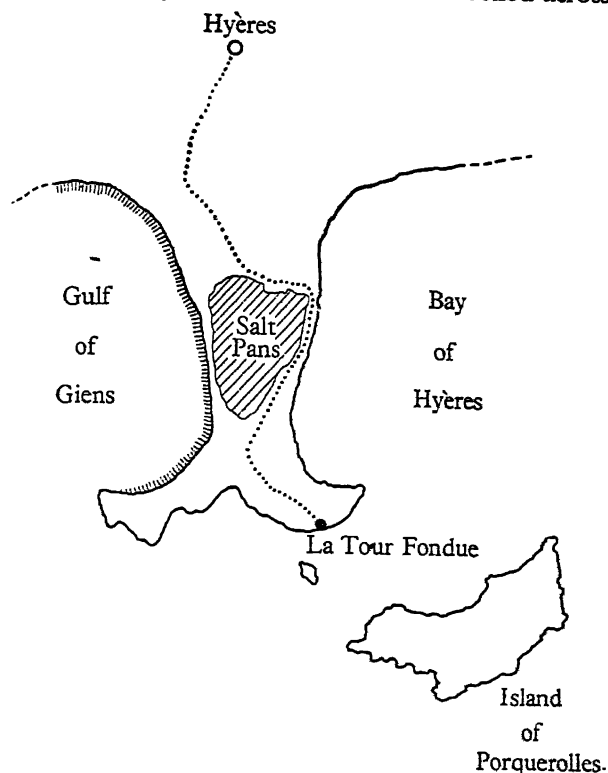
corner. Five minutes passed; then ten; and what Richleigh was waiting for Franklin had no idea. Then he tried his first bluff. In his best manner he approached the Englishman and addressed him in fluent Italian. Richleigh seemed rather self-conscious. He shook his head, tapped his chest and remarked, "Anglais!" Franklin replied with more Italian. But just then a bus drew up at the kerb and Richleigh, obviously relieved, got in.

Franklin got in too. Where he was going he had not the least idea and there were his belongings too, at the hotel. Still, he took the back seat and hoped for the best. The difficult thing would be to follow Richleigh when he descended without drawing attention to himself. Also there was the question of what fare to take. Still, the conductor took his five franc note and gave him a ticket. "One stage only," thought Franklin, "and about three miles." But he was a long way out. The bus went due west; then swung south by the side of a vast stretch of salt pools. On the raised causeway were mountains of salt, tiled in against the rain. Then came a halt at a hamlet; a mile or two along a narrow isthmus; hillier country with entrancing views of landlocked bays, and finally a sharp descent, a sudden bend and then—the sea!

The passengers alighted, Richleigh among them. Down below them was the stone jetty, and anchored by it could be seen a small motor launch, the *Cormoran*. Looked down upon from the height the scene was like an Arthur Watts drawing. Above by the bus was an inn with its tables set out on the stone-flagged square. Here one or two of his fellow-passengers paused for a hasty drink; the

FRANKLIN MAKES A FRESH START

others moved down the slope towards the boat. Then the bus circled ready for the return journey and three passengers, obviously from the *Cormoran* got in. Franklin, after his short leg-stretch, did the same, and from the window looked across



the sea. In a second or two he had to make up his mind. Was he to follow his quarry or keep out of sight?

Then in the distance he noticed something. The

light might have been deceptive but there, three or four miles away on the horizon, lay what could only be an island. It seemed the faintest mark against the skyline; a kind of whale almost hidden in the mist. Further east too, another island could be discerned; or was it two?

Franklin decided to stay where he was. After all, islands don't run away. And then the last packages were stored on the *Cormoran* and she cast off, chug-chugging steadily. Standing on the deck was Richleigh, his face towards the island. Then the sound of voices was heard; the driver and his conductor left the inn; the parcels were put in the back and the return journey began.

"Where does it go to, that boat?" asked Franklin of his neighbour.

The man looked surprised. "To the Island of Porquerolles!"

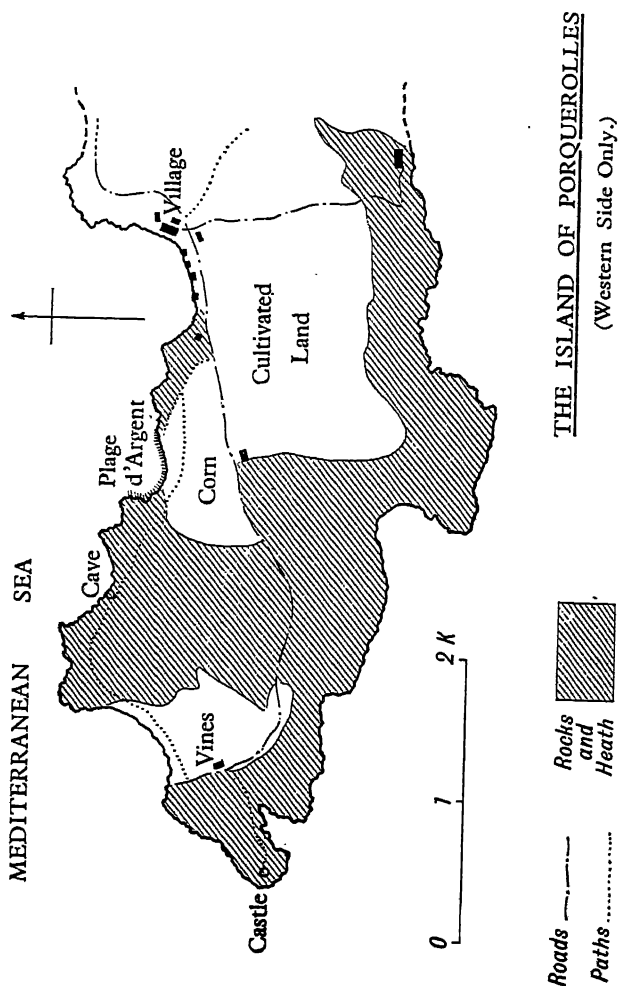
"Really!" said Franklin. "And how does one amuse one's self there?"

In many ways, as he learned. In the season there was swimming and always there were fine walks for those who liked that sort of thing. On the island was an excellent hotel, owned like everything else there, including the *Cormoran*, by the gentleman who possessed the whole island. A service of autos like the one they were in, travelled daily from Hyères and the times could be got from the conductor. Was the island worth visiting? Why certainly! It had a Moorish Castle, a Pirates' Cave and the most magnificent of views. Monsieur was English perhaps? Italian? But how interesting! M. Papini of the hotel—l'Hotel des Iles d'Or—was Italian also. And from then to the end of the

journey the two of them jabbered away and in the half hour Franklin got as much information as a much longer study of the guide book could not have given him.

Back in Hyères there was plenty of work to do; visits to the police; the manager of the principal cinema, and to a bookseller where he was advised to take the Abbé Ferrat's book on the Island of Porquerolles. There was money too, that had to be spent on new clothes; not that he wore anything aggressively English. Still it would be safer to remove tailors' tabs and laundry marks and to acquire a little more Italian sartorial colour.

Then too, his original scheme concerning Gaston de Foix and a historical picture had to go by the board. Finally he decided that M. Vittorini would have to be the representative of an Italian company with headquarters in Turin. The picture he would make play with should be a melodramatic affair, dealing either with Algerian corsairs or modern spies, but requiring in either case highly romantic backgrounds. All which done he left instructions to be called at 7.0; went to bed and slept like a dormouse.



CHAPTER XVII

THE ISLAND OF PORQUEROLLES

(A)

Nothing that happened during Franklin's short stay in the Island of Porquerolles solved entirely the mystery of the Perfect Murder and yet everything that happened contributed to its final solution. And curiously enough, it was the small and apparently irrelevant happenings that contributed most.

Take for instance the journey to La Tour Fondue. When he awoke a stiff breeze was blowing and somewhere in the back of his mind was the indefinite feeling that all was not what it should be. Then he realised just what the mental disturbance was—the crossing from the mainland. The sight of the tiny *Cormoran*, setting her nose to the sea, had made him wonder how she would stand it on a rough day. He himself had always been a bad sailor. How people could for pleasure go down to the sea in small boats was beyond him.

He caught the early bus and from his seat by the driver put more than one cautious question. The reason for the breeze? A mistral coming. Would the sea be rough? Perhaps a little, but to-night! To Franklin the pace of the auto seemed a crawl, with that sea getting worse every minute but when the jetty was reached there was the *Cormoran* bobbing

up and down at anchor and nobody showing the least excitement in spite of the little white flecks showing in the channel. There were half a dozen passengers besides himself; four of them women.

"A bit rough," he remarked to the deck-hand, who with bare feet was moving like a tightrope walker. The man shook his head and pointed to his tongue.

"That's Muet," said one of the passengers. "He's deaf and dumb."

Out in the middle channel there was a heavy swell. The *Cormoran* sank in the troughs and rose like a cork to the crests. Slowly the island came in sight, its houses discernible. As the captain collected the fares Franklin, with a rare assumption of seamanship, remarked that they were having a good crossing. Was the sea ever so rough that the *Cormoran* could not make it? Only once, the skipper assured him, and during the previous winter. Besides, the *Cormoran* carried the mails and was therefore on government service.

The village seemed quite a large one and above it towered what looked like the keep of a medieval fortress. Almost at the water's edge stood the hotel, a three-storied building with wide, glass-covered veranda in front. Franklin picked up his heavy suitcase and ploughed through the sand to the side door. Boarded off from the main dining-room was an office and in this the manager was sitting.

"You have a room, monsieur?" said Franklin, giving his hat a flourish.

The manager admitted that he had, but with no particular enthusiasm. For how long would it be wanted? Franklin proceeded to explain. It might

be two or three days or then again, it might be a week. His report to his employers would have to be final but all depended on how the picture fitted the scenery. One could not tell until one saw.

"But you could not make pictures here," said the manager. "The permission of the patron would have to be obtained."

"We do things differently in Torino," retorted Franklin with a grandiose gesture. "All that can arrange itself."

"Monsieur is from Torino?"

"I was born there and my mother too."

M. Papini shook hands fervently. "There was something about you, signor, that I could not place; something distinguished and very different. There is a room, the best in the hotel, facing the sea. It is yours for one night; for two; for as long as you like."

There was nothing wrong with that. The manager escorted his fellow countryman up the stairs to the first landing where the room stood at the handier end of the corridor. Its narrow end faced the sea and the longer side looked over a pine covered slope.

"Superb," said Franklin. "It is good to be among friends."

Across the road, facing the square and the eternal eucalyptus trees, was a café-restaurant and there the two went. M. Papini forgot the urgency of his accounts under the spell of the enchanting voice of his guest; a man who had travelled much, who knew London like the back of his hand, and who now represented interests of first class importance.

"The world is a small place," said Papini, "and the war changed many things."

"It is the habit of wars," said Vittorini sententially. "This island too; always with those Moors on its doorstep and their galleys smelling their way round its coast. Those were not very good times."

"And now you come to begin it all over again," laughed the other, "what with your Algerians and pirates and Christians. The hotel could accommodate a good thirty at a pinch; but of course you would give ample warning."

Vittorini finished his *apéritif* and announced that he would have to get to work. Where was that *Sou-terrain des Pirates*—that pirates' cave?

"At the other end of the island," was the reply. "If you are a good walker, half an hour or perhaps more. And you must know the way."

"Body of Bacchus!" exclaimed Vittorini. "Am I an athlete to walk there and back? Is there not an auto?"

"Not on the island," the other assured him. "M. le patron had one to cart the stones from the quarries but in a month it shook itself to pieces on the roads. Teeth of a Turk! What roads!" and he spat.

The other mopped his head for the sun was warm and the spot sheltered. "You have somebody in the hotel who will show this place? I will go in the afternoon. There will not be so much sun."

M. Vittorini was lucky. There was at the moment in the hotel an artist, an Englishman, who went out all day making sketches and returned for lunch. Perhaps he would show the place. And now another *apéritif*? But M. Vittorini excused himself. He

must unpack his bag and write a letter or two. So with a ceremonious salute the two parted, both well pleased and for reasons which in neither case appeared on the surface.

At lunch M. Vittorini turned out to be a gross feeder. He tucked his napkin well into his collar and enjoyed himself thoroughly. From his seat facing the door he watched the entrance of Richleigh, whose face seemed tanned almost to negro blackness. And when the coffee arrived he made his way to the bureau.

"A thousand pardons, but this Englishman who would take me to the cave?"

Papini got up delightedly and led the way to the Englishman's table. As soon as the film expert saw him he smiled as if he recognised a lost relative, and explained in a stream of rapid Italian that he had seen the other the previous day at Hyères. He also ventured to pat him on the back. Richleigh looked as if he had tumbled into a circus tent.

The manager explained in French which had to be funereal. Vittorini cut in with pantomimic explanations of his own and a word or two of English. "Feelm! Cinema! Feelm!" and altogether it must have been amazingly funny to watch. Then a map of the island was fetched and the Souterrain des Pirates pointed out, and after further pantomime and linguistic explosions there finally dawned on Richleigh just what was wanted. He smiled and nodded, and then, "Quelle heure?"

Vittorini held up two fingers. "Deux heures!" Then further smiles, a pat on the back from Vittorini and all was settled.

(B)

Franklin was glad of that half hour's respite after lunch. The walk was going to be a ticklish thing and would need some preparation. That it would be necessary to keep at high tension he realised; that it would be as grotesque as it was, he hardly imagined.

There was a man once, and the story is implicitly true, who met a Bedouin boy in the Sinai Desert. One knew no Arabic and the other no English. Yet the two had a really interesting conversation wherein the Englishman learned, among other things, that the youth had two brothers and two sisters. His father had been killed outright by a Turkish shell; his mother had had a leg blown off and had died almost at once. The two sisters had disappeared. One brother had died of—apparently—dysentery and the other was in the Camel Corps.

From the wealth of gesture, direct acting and facial distortion that went to make up that conversation, may be gathered some idea of the forty minutes' walk—nearly all uphill—which this latest mono-lingual couple attempted. In most ways it was far more difficult. One could scarcely roll on the ground and make noises! The matter to explain was moreover fairly technical. But all the same, to any continuous observer, this new pilgrims' progress must have been extremely diverting. M. Vitorini had his three languages at command, if indeed the English he exhibited could be allowed to count, consisting as it did of occasional words spoken with strange accents. As for Richleigh, he struggled with much the same handicap in French. and en-

deavoured, more or less vainly, to make the other understand a kind of baby or pidgin English.

Imagine something like this. The path through the *bruyères* or among the pines swerved to the right. Vittorini would smile comprehensively, shoot out an arm and say, "Alla destra. Droit. Eengleesh?" and, "Right!" would bellow the other as if noise were a deciding factor in understanding. A few yards further on, the mainland would be visible. Another smile and, "Lontano. Lointain," and this time no reply. However a smile all the same and then Richleigh, tapping a tree trunk, "Pine!" "Ah!" would exclaim the other, "Sapin!" and Richleigh, "That's it; 'pine'."

As they swung round the headland and down to the beach Richleigh gave a sudden exclamation. "Look out there! Your foot!" Vittorini turned round to smile and came a fearful purler over a root.

"I say; I'm dreadfully sorry," began Richleigh, and then at the sight of his companion's trousers, "Oh hell!"

But beyond a cut knee and scratched hands, no harm was done. For another five minutes they moved along the top of the cliff and then, at two pines which hung towards the sea, Richleigh stopped.

"Le souterrain des pirates?" inquired Vittorini. The other nodded and pointed down.

Then came the pantomimic masterpiece. By hook or crook the exact object of the visit had to be explained. Vittorini turned the handle of a machine; he directed through an imaginary megaphone; he was a corsair with turban and scimitar; he rowed at

the galley oar; in short he sweated blood. At intervals he repeated, "Feel! Cinema!" and was finally rewarded by seeing a look of comprehension come into the other's eyes. Indeed Richleigh repeated some of the performance. Vittorini beamed approval and pointed down to the cave. Then the descent began.

For thirty feet downwards they zigzagged by a series of rough steps cut in the rock. Then came twenty feet at a steeper angle with the steps cut more cleanly. Richleigh went first, lowering himself gingerly, since the spray from the roughening sea made the going treacherous. Once Richleigh called, "Give me your foot!" and the other thought it best to halt and see what the message meant.

But when they reached the foot of the stairs there was nothing to see. There was an opening but no bigger than a cupboard, and as for the cavern where the corsairs once had their stronghold, a landslide had filled it in. In front too, towards the sea, were rocks and boulders; only the deep, sheltered bay with its tiny entrance showed what the spot might once have been.

Vittorini, having expressed his opinion on the uselessness of the sight for his purpose, pointed upwards for the return journey. "You go first," said Richleigh, and seeing the vacancy in the other's eyes, took the lead himself. And as Vittorini took the last step he saw what he had not previously noticed; a castle perched at the very extremity of the island, and not more than a mile away. He pointed it out.

"Moors. Château," explained Richleigh.

"Ah! Le Château des Maures!" said Vittorini,

with obvious satisfaction and waved an invitation to proceed. And this time the climb was worth while.

Poised sheer above the Mediterranean and on almost the last yard of foothold, was a massive square tower. Around it were walls, enclosing what had once been courtyards and rooms. Then the sun came out for the occasion. The grey sea became purple and shot with emerald currents; the pines took on a distant blue; the bare fields showed a rosy madder and the rocks revealed their fissures and a delicacy of greens and greys. "Che bella vista!" exclaimed Vittorini and turned to his companion. But Richleigh was not there.

In a minute or two he appeared from somewhere behind the great tower, carrying a portfolio. From this he took a sketch and handed it to the Italian. And the fellow could paint! There was a superb poster effect with primary colours on a broad canvas. "Magnifique!" was his comment. Richleigh smiled, replaced the picture and produced another; a watercolour as dainty and finished as a Rutherford fan.

Then M. Vittorini did a strange thing. He pulled out a roll of notes, retained the sketch and indicated that the artist should help himself. Richleigh blushed, then shook his head. He replaced the sketch, went through the motions of painting another one, and solemnly presented it to the kindly critic. Vittorini was overjoyed. He promptly wrote out an address, loosed a flood of thanks and patted the artist on the back. Then he consulted his watch, held up ten fingers, pointed to the sea and went off to explore on his own account.

Though not discernible from the summit, there was a path that led sheer down the cliff to a narrow beach where once the long galleys had thrust their noses. But this was of small interest to Franklin. What he wanted was a minute or two's relief from the strain of that infernal mimicry; the chance to be himself for the space of just one cigarette. When he made the ascent again, there was Richleigh, sitting on a mound of broken rock, smoking his pipe.

"La pipe," said M. Vittorini observantly, and pointing to his own packet of Marylands, "Spagnoletti! Cigarettes!" And with that the mad conversation began afresh.

They made the return journey by a rough road that ran clean through the centre of the island. The eastern side, he gathered, was uninteresting, being nearly all under cultivation. Not a soul was seen till the green shuttered villas came in sight and the village began. The dusk was coming on and on the mainland the lights began to twinkle. In the air was the smell of the south; the leaves of orange trees, smoke of wood fires, the whiff of a cigarette and the faint odour of garlic. On the square the men were still throwing their balls and arguing fiercely. At the hotel door the two parted, with thanks and smiles and amiability. Franklin felt his brain whirling and as tired as if he had played a day's chess.

But when he got to bed that night it was not to sleep. There were things that had occurred that afternoon that set his brain working with full activity and after an hour of it he got out and wrote up his notes. And just before he did go to sleep, the last thing he had in his mind was the way Rich-

leigh had appeared to look at him from the dinner table; with eyes quietly observant and yet wholly cynical.

(c)

The morning dawned cold but clear and by nine M. Vittorini was up and on the quay, taking a constitutional and watching the progress of the *Cor-moran* till she came in. Then from the small shop on the Square he bought a paper which the launch had brought in and on the counter saw a *Daily Mail*.

"It is ordered, that paper?" he asked.

"Yes," was the reply. "An Englishman at the hotel has ordered it."

"Really," said Franklin. "Does one find English often on the island?"

"Not very often. But at Easter sometimes one or two arrive. And always they ask for an English paper."

For half an hour he smoked his pipe and read his paper and then came an interview with Papini. The Moorish Castle was a magnificent site, but was there anything else that might be useful? Papini suggested the Plage d'Argent, a crescent of silver sand that lay to the west; the same road as the previous day but by a path that left the main road.

There was no sign of Richleigh but Franklin was not sorry. A morning like that afternoon would be too much. One could pay too great a price for surveillance. So he set out briskly along the road; cut through a pine wood that lay to the right and came out on the rocks that overlooked a bay.

Then the noise of a motor boat attracted him;

the *Cormoran* perhaps, setting off for another crossing. But the noise was too close for that; it was almost beneath him. With a perfectly natural curiosity he leaned out over a projecting rock and peered below. In a motor boat, large enough for half a dozen passengers, sat Richleigh alone. The engine was shut off and what Franklin saw made him draw back further behind his shelter. Then in a minute or two the engine chugged again. For a few yards the boat lazed at five or six knots, then turning to the open channel, it leaped into action and became a black streak in the white spray. As it rounded the headland and met the heavy water it slowed down, and long after it was out of sight its engine was plainly audible.

The visit to the Plage d'Argent was abandoned and in five minutes Franklin was back at the hotel. He reached his room unobserved and found he was in luck. The bed had been made and in the corridor was no sign of a maid. Now from which door had Richleigh emerged the previous evening? The second surely. He tried the handle. To his surprise the door opened. The room, moreover was empty, swept and garnished.

Like a flash Franklin was here and there. The contents of the open suitcase, two drawers that opened easily, the articles on the dressing table were all hurriedly glanced at. On another table lay odd books and papers; a *French Made Easy* and a guidebook, *Porquerolles et les Iles d'Or*. He flicked over quickly the leaves of them both and on the inside of the back cover of the latter saw something that interested him. He went quickly to the corridor and regained his room. Then as furtively

the book was replaced. After that for the best part of an hour he busied himself with his pocket timetable and what he learned from it must have been disquieting for he looked worried and more than once he paced the room.

In the cool of the evening came an apéritif at the café-restaurant Papillot, with his host. Could one hire a motor boat on the island? he asked. Usually yes, was the answer. For the moment however, the one worth hiring had been taken over by M. Richleigh. Papillot moreover who owned the boat, gave them to understand that Richleigh had taken it for an indefinite period. He and Le Muet were going out fishing that night if the sea was quiet enough.

Then Richleigh himself passed and was called to join them. Had M. Papini a book about the island? Papini passed the question on to Richleigh who was only too pleased to slip into the hotel and get his. When it came Vittorini studied it intently, though its importance consisted mainly in the fact that what he looked for didn't happen to be there.

That was Franklin's last day on the island. Physically he was feeling so fit that he could have pushed over the proverbial church. After lunch the next day, and still in perfect weather, he crossed on the *Cormoran*. At Hyères he paid a flying visit to the Syndicat d'Initiative; the information bureau for the benefit of travellers. From Toulon he wrote to a cousin in Turin, asking him to send to England any package which might arrive for him. He thus made sure of receiving from Richleigh the promised water-colour, in spite of the false address he had been forced to give.

The following afternoon he made the crossing in vile weather from Calais. At Dover a bitter wind was blowing and a sleety rain lashed against the carriage windows. It seemed incredible that only a day before he had been sitting in the *Cormoran*, hatless and full of the exhilaration of life, with the sun as warm as on an English day of June and the pleasant smell of the pines still in his nostrils. And as the fields of Kent swept by in the rainy mist, he smoked his pipe and thought of the Island of Porquerolles; its woods, its beaches, its sun, its food and good fellowship; and certainly not least, of that most painstaking of guides, that most poetical of painters, that most interesting of personalities—Frank Richleigh.

CHAPTER XVIII

FRANKLIN SEES DAYLIGHT

"You certainly look the better for it," said Travers as they drew their chairs up to the fire after an excellent dinner. "You sure it wasn't Vienna?"

"Vienna?" repeated Franklin, rather puzzled. "Oh, thyroid gland." He laughed, and the laugh was a cheerful one with some new confidence in it. "If the new department gets on its feet I hope all the crooks will decamp to the Riviera."

"Especially in November," added Travers, waving his hand towards the window against which the rain was pelting. "And now what's all the really sensational news?"

Franklin got out his notebook. "I don't want to appear as Holmes with you as Watson, but if you don't mind I'll go over the principal points as I made them. Almost as many as Woodrow Wilson's. I told you about the island generally and the humorous business with languages, but these are the special things that arose.

"A. Fundamentally the situation hasn't altered. Wharton was correct about the alibi and we may take it that Frank Richleigh did *not* commit the Murder. But, I had one idea. His alibi grows stronger every day. When Wharton interviewed the people concerned he brought clearly to their notice the events into which he had to enquire.

They've told him that certain dates were correct. As soon as I asked the same questions they answered me more readily than I imagine they did him. If anybody else asks them those questions in a year's time, they'll have the answers still more pat, since the questions will have been impressed on their minds on two previous occasions. If therefore the original alibi was false, it's too late now to prove it so."

"Just a minute," said Travers. "I'm going to enjoy this without disturbance. Fill your pipe and let's get down to it. And fill your glass."

"Not the glass," said Franklin, stoking his pipe. "But if I give you some information that's really interesting, you shall fill it for me afterwards. That's a bargain? Good! Now listen to this, I wanted to see, on your own suggestion, how I reacted to Frank Richleigh. The situation was unusual on account of that comic business I told you about but the impressions I gathered were these. Richleigh is an attractive fellow in many ways but he seemed to me to have qualities that more than counteracted his better points. In other words, I didn't like him. Not only that, but in those conversations we conducted in gibberish and sign language, I'm as sure as that I'm sitting here now——"

"Waiting for a drink!"

"Yes, waiting for a drink; that on at least three occasions he tried deliberately to catch me out by making sudden remarks in English to see if I responded. You must take my word for it but I could repeat it with much more emphasis."

"You thought he saw the nigger in the wood-pile?"

"I thought he was on the lookout for the nigger; that's the important thing. Perhaps Wharton stroked him the wrong way, but suspicious he was, and that's certain. And though I say it as shouldn't, I'm positive he got no change out of me. That's point B. Now comes C. I also tried a little catch or two on the same lines but in French. And as a result I'm perfectly convinced that Frank Richleigh knows much more of that language than he pretends."

"You really think so? But of course it would be much easier to fake ignorance and a horrible accent than one would at first imagine. And he couldn't have forgotten so hopelessly what he was taught at school."

"Point D. Richleigh had given at the paper shop on the island a special order for a *Daily Mail*. One morning he got his paper and went in his motor boat to a lonely spot and pulled up there for a minute or two. Then he looked through that paper feverishly, like a man who wants desperately badly to see if anything's there. He scanned every column from front page to back. Then he put the paper away like a man relieved and hared off in the boat. There was the report of a Test Match in that paper but he didn't stop to read it."

"Hm! Anything else?"

"Plenty! Point E for instance. I found in a book of his some pencilled notes of times of trains from Victoria to—not Carcassonne as you'd expect—but to Hyères, with an added time for the bus to La Tour Fondue and actual arrival at Porquerolles. He'd never done that journey and when later he had to lend me that book he rubbed out those notes with scrupulous care. Further than that,

I inquired at the Syndicat d'Initiative at Hyères and showed them Richleigh's photo and one of the clerks was sure that he was a man who called there in the summer! In other words I'm pretty sure I could prove to you that in spite of what he pretends, Richleigh had planned as long ago as the beginning of his summer holiday to go to Porquerolles, and moreover actually paid a visit, at least as far as La Tour Fondue, to spy out the land."

"Preparing a bolt hole, you think?"

"Why not? Porquerolles is a lonely place but marvellously handy for bigger places—Toulon and Marseilles—where the ships start from. Then point F, which I thought of in the train. If you think back into the mind of the public and the Press doesn't it strike you that everybody expected the Perfect Murder to take place at night, say round about 10.0 p.m.?"

"Now you come to speak of it, I think we all did."

"And what happened? It took place in the early evening, at 7.30 to be precise. Suppose the murderer had wanted to catch the 8.50 from Victoria he could just have managed it."

And having made that point he watched the changing expressions on the face of Ludovic Travers as he sat looking into the fire. "Not only that, but *if*; I grant you the 'if' is an insuperable 'if'; still, if Frank Richleigh committed the murder he would not have wanted the maid to see him escape. He would not have been able to disguise himself effectively for the simple reason that he couldn't have removed the disguise in the time available after the murder; that is if he wanted to catch the boat train for France."

But Travers kept back his questions. He merely nodded, then, "Good! What next?"

"One point only and it occurred to me when I was returning home. You've referred to it to-night without knowing it. And like all the other points it's not worth tuppence as far as a jury is concerned. When I left Porquerolles the weather was gorgeous, the sun was shining and the air was like a tonic. Three months and they'll be bathing again and having sunbaths. Still, you know it all better than I can describe it; the unlimited leisure, scenery by the acre, the simple life if you want it and plenty of the other thing if you don't. And all for forty francs a day, with the exchange at 125! Then England—listen to it for a second—rain and wind and fog and sleet. My God, thought I; if I had enough money would I be such a fool as to stand another English November? Then I went on without knowing it. If I were a schoolmaster, a member of the most unappreciated, unromantic and unremunerative profession there is; if I had ideas I couldn't use, tastes I hadn't the time or money to cultivate, colleagues whom I despised intellectually and who regarded me as a fool; a headmaster bound stiff with red tape and his own importance; a job I couldn't leave because I was too old; if I'd lost my savings in a bad investment as Richleigh had, and lastly if I'd a chest which gave me a bad time every winter; then, I put it to you, wouldn't I do a great deal to—to—well, find my Island of Porquerolles?"

Travers got up. "You deserve more than a drink. You ought to put the decanter in your pocket."

"I know I got that speech off by heart. But

seriously, is there anything in all those points of mine?"

"I think," said Travers, "and I think it in all seriousness, that if your words are nails driven by the master of assemblies, they look like being somebody's coffin nails."

Franklin thought that over, then took a pull at the drink. "Now you have a shot at the Aunt Sally!"

"I won't do that," said Travers, "because I've more than a suspicion that in this particular context I'm a bit of an Aunt Sally myself. Also destructive criticism is anybody's game. But I would like to know if Frank Richleigh really did pay that exploratory visit to the island in the summer."

"It would have been easy enough. Only two nights absent from the hotel and he might have gone there before he came to town. But he couldn't have been in two places at once on the night of the murder."

"Has anything struck you as unusual about those alibis?" asked Travers.

"No," replied the other in astonishment.

"Well perhaps not unusual but interesting. Who established the lawyer's alibi?"

"His wife, daughter and a local curate."

"And the actor's?"

"All the company he was playing in."

"And the parson's?"

"His wife, two maids and an ostler."

"And the schoolmaster's?"

"The proprietors of two hotels, a bureau clerk and a waiter."

"That's just it. Three alibis remain constant irre-

spective of the passing of time. The fourth, as you pointed out, grows stronger and less vulnerable every day. Three are established by those who could never make a mistake; the fourth by utter strangers. Three take place almost on the domestic hearth; the fourth in a remote corner of another country."

"That's a sound enough argument. But the fact remains; that alibi can't be upset. Wharton knows it and I'd swear it."

"Probably it can't. And as you said, time is getting on. If it can't be upset to-day, it's far more immovable in a month's time. It's a geometrical, not an arithmetical progression, if you look at it from the point of view of a specialist in mathematics like Richleigh. But could he be in two places at the same time?"

"If he could, it amounts to unearthing a case of impersonation and that would involve finding the impersonator. The whole idea seems to me to be *possible* only in the sense that in this world we hardly dare say what is really *impossible*."

"I should say definitely it was impossible," said Travers. "Piccadilly Circus is supposed to be the hub of the English universe and all the world to pass by it; yet if you or I stood there for months and watched every face we should never find the perfect double we're popularly supposed to possess."

Franklin agreed. "But for all that, you admit that Frank Richleigh is seriously mixed up in it. If he didn't do that murder, he knows who did."

Both were silent, feeling that something was in the air. Travers sat, or rather sprawled, with his long legs stretched to the fire and his hands pressed

together as if seeking the right word. Franklin seemed to look through the fire into some world of his own imagination. It was Travers who spoke first.

"What do you think you'll do now?"

"Go to Muffley Hill first of all and try to get into contact with as many persons as I can who knew Richleigh. I'll collect every scrap of gossip, every remembered conversation and every impression. Potter's been down there a day or two in a quiet way. It was he who got that news about Richleigh losing his money. Still, I thought I'd go down there myself, while the iron's hot so to speak, and get my own ideas. Then I hope to get other contacts like the names of cricket teams he's played for. Then I shall go on to Little Martens and collect up the gossip there. And when I've finished I shall go over the reams of notes and get them correlated. By that time I shall have a pretty sound idea of what Frank Richleigh is really like."

"A long job!"

"As you say. What I feel however is that I'm no longer lost. I'm in a tunnel and if I only have the patience to keep plodding on I must come to the end where the daylight is. Still, as I was saying, when I've finished in England I'm going to France again. I may have to take a film photographer with me for a blind but I'm going to live near Richleigh for days. If I got those ideas I told you about in a few hours, what oughtn't I to get if I live with him for a week or two, especially when you consider all the new facts and theories I shall take over with me from England?"

"It reduces itself to what we said a good few

weeks ago," said Travers. "It's a case that calls for the methods of Lecoq. Sooner or later something's going to be dropped—it may be something apparently insignificant—and then things are going to start happening."

"They'll happen all right," said Franklin. "What's more, if I'm sure you understand why I say it, I shan't report to you again till I've got something really worth reporting. When I've got some news as important as, well, say what I brought back from Porquerolles, then I'll come along with it like a streak of lightning."

.

For some minutes after Franklin had gone, Travers sat before the fire. Then he pushed the bell for Palmer.

As a gentleman's servant, butler, major-domo, call him what you will, Palmer stood high in the estimation of St. Martin's Chambers. To his colleagues he could unbend and yet keep an essential and ultimate reserve. In some previous incarnation, according to Ludovic Travers, he had probably been a raven; black-coated and not unmindful of his young. As he stood there waiting for orders, he presented a figure dignified and composed.

"Oh Palmer; you busy for a minute?"

"No sir."

"Sit down then and draw up to the fire. Look here; I'd rather like to have your opinion on something. Did you ever read up that Perfect Murder Case at all?"

Palmer was not in the least disconcerted. Conversations of that kind were by no means unusual.

So he put the tips of his fingers together and gave as cautious a reply as possible.

"Well, I did read it, sir, and then again in a manner of speaking, I didn't."

"Not studied it in detail."

"No sir; can't say I have. I did glance at the story of that housekeeper, sir, but not from what you might call the murder point of view."

"Sort of professional *esprit de corps*, what? Then it's no use asking you who did it?"

"I'm afraid not, sir."

"Hm! You back horses sometimes?"

Palmer was perfectly unruffled. "Sometimes I do sir and sometimes I don't."

"A very sound answer. However, suppose you do back a horse. On what principle do you work?"

"Well sir; sometimes the Major gives me a tip and sometimes Mr. Henry does and I put on my half-crown and that's all there is to it."

"Except collecting the boodle. Then you never have a sudden intuition by any chance?"

Palmer achieved a master stroke of diplomacy. "That depends on what you mean by 'intuition,' sir."

"Intuition? Well, an instinctive guess. You never had one in your life?"

"Oh yes sir. The trouble is they didn't turn out right."

Travers nodded. "Now, what about this? I try to sell you a bit of Waterford glass, like this stuff you've handled all your life, except that it's the cleverest fake there could be; feel, colour, marks, everything perfect. Yet you won't touch it. Why?"

Palmer's face lost its wariness and became more animated. "I don't know sir, and you don't know, only something inside me would say, 'Leave it alone.' That's all, sir, and if I wasn't a fool I *should* leave it alone."

Travers smiled. "Good! Now let's have a last question. Suppose I had an intuition of that kind about something in which I was interested; say for example this murder case. Ought I in your opinion to trust that intuition?"

"Yes sir; if you're a policeman."

Travers fairly roared. "Palmer; you're a philosopher. But to get to business. There's a little scheme I've got in my mind which I'd rather like your help in," and he explained it in some length.

And as Palmer left the room some minutes later, with an expression of puzzled concern on his face, Travers rang up the Academic Theatre, where he hoped to catch before his departure, Roland du Fresne, the well-known actor-manager.

CHAPTER XIX

COMIC RELIEF AND A CROSS-WORD PUZZLE

SOME few days later, in the room of Ludovic Travers, at Durango House, the telephone bell rang. He picked up the receiver. "Hallo. Yes, speaking . . . Mr. Franklin has just gone to his office? Thank you exchange. Put me through, will you?"

The conversation then ran something like this. "Hallo! That you Franklin? Travers speaking. What's the news? . . . Well, there's heaps of time yet. And look here now; there's something most frightfully important I want you to do for me. Do you know Gregorio's night club in Charing Cross Road? . . . Well, it's under the shop of Wilberforce, the sporting print man. There's a basement underneath and a door at the Leicester Square side. You go right down and show your card and I'll have the rest fixed up. You got that? . . . Time? Oh yes. Be there at nine sharp. There won't be anybody much about the place and I've got an idea that something funny's going to happen. Are you there? . . . I want you to follow this closely. Be there at nine sharp. If you see me, pay no attention whatever. If I leave the place without speaking to you, go away but don't follow. Don't even come to the flat. You got that all right? . . . Good! Then if I don't speak to you, be at the same place the same time on the following night. Can you manage that?"

. . . I'm afraid it's a bit melodramatic, but it can't be helped. But it's awfully good of you. Good-bye!" and he replaced the receiver quickly and left the room.

A thoroughly perplexed Franklin presented himself therefore at 9.0 p.m. at the foot of the stairs that led to Gregorio's. He handed his card as directed to the black-coated shop-walker at the door.

"Mr. Franklin? Ah yes sir. Your coat and hat sir. This seat if you don't mind. Black coffee or white sir? And a liqueur sir? Thank you sir."

From his comfortable seat Franklin surveyed the room. In length it seemed a good cricket pitch but narrow in proportion. In the middle of the left side was the bar and elsewhere round the room was a continuous lounge seat and a string of tables. The polished floor looked a good one but at the moment it was unoccupied. Indeed, the room was practically empty. At the far end a couple of girls were chattering over some kind of a drink and at the bar two elderly men were conversing in semi-whispers. In the far right corner the piano and deserted music stands alone marked the prospect of an orchestra. Franklin sipped his black coffee, sat well back in his padded seat and waited for the ball to start rolling.

There was not long to wait. Voices were heard in the lobby outside and before he was aware of it the familiar figure of Ludovic Travers slid by over the slippery floor, heading for the bar. He nodded pleasantly to the elderly pair, thrust his head over the bar counter and planted his elbows firmly. When the shirt-sleeved attendant placed a drink in

front of him, he made an inaudible remark to the pair, nodded and finished it at a go. Then he looked round the room and his eyes seemed to pass over Franklin without observing him, though that might have been an effect produced by the hornrims. Then he moved off to the far end of the room.

There to Franklin's amazement he promptly engaged in conversation with the women. There was a peal of laughter and one of them moved along the lounge seat to make room for the newcomer. A waiter appeared, disappeared and returned with three cocktails, at the sight of which Travers removed his glasses and blinked vigorously. Then followed ten minutes of mirthful chatter, of pretty somethings whispered into pretty ears and occasional outbursts of giggling.

When the two departed to the roguish wag of Travers' finger, the room was beginning to fill up. Travers again removed his glasses and after the usual polish, peered round the room. There was another ten minutes of waiting and then he looked at his watch. Then he left the room by a side door. Franklin with his curiosity entirely unsatisfied, waited a few minutes, then called for his hat and coat and left also. What the whole business meant he hadn't the faintest idea unless it was that much business had driven Travers mad.

Twice during the following day he phoned through to the finance department but Travers was not there. Speculation was equally unprofitable and there seemed to be nothing for it but to possess his soul in patience and go through the performance again. And the second night turned out to be in its preliminaries exactly like the first, except that the

room was nearly full and the orchestra was present. Moreover when Travers appeared he made straight for Franklin's corner, his face beaming with pleasure.

"Hullo, young feller. Nice sort of place to find you in!"

Franklin smiled. "I'm not the only whited sepulchre."

"So I expect. Now what about a drink?"

"What do you make of it?" asked Travers as they sat watching the crowd. "Quite a modest haunt of vice?"

Franklin's reply was drowned by the band which struck into the rhythmic lilt of "Mammy's Little Kitten," and he waited for a quieter moment. "Seems well conducted."

"By the way," said Travers, "I'm awfully sorry about last night. I hope you weren't too annoyed at not seeing me?"

"Oh, I saw you all right," laughed Franklin, "and——"

"You saw me!" exclaimed the other. "What time was that?"

"At nine fifteen. That was when you came in, wasn't it?"

"Came in! Came in where?"

"Came in here," said Franklin jocularly.

"Here! My dear fellow, I was at the Portico at nine fifteen last night, talking to Chief-Constable Scott and I didn't leave till ten."

"Well I'm damned! Just a second; here's the shop-walker. Look here. This gentleman says he wasn't here last night and I say he was. Now you tell us who's right."

"The gentleman *was* here sir."

Franklin beamed. "You saw him and spoke to him?"

"Yes sir."

"At about nine fifteen?"

"About that, sir."

"Looks rather as if you were right," replied Travers with a perfectly serious face. "If so it's a queer sort of business. Who else saw me do you think?"

But at the bar the results were equally surprising; the attendant remembered the gentleman perfectly. Travers appeared to be flabbergasted and Franklin couldn't help rubbing it in. "Somebody's been impersonating you. It's a pity your two charming acquaintances don't seem to be here!"

"Let's get round to the flat," said Travers, "and talk this over. We can get there in three minutes."

Palmer let them in and ventured a "Good evening sir!" to Franklin on his own account. When they had settled down before a blazing fire, Travers re-opened the discussion.

"You say you saw me at Gregorio's at nine fifteen last night."

"I certainly did. You remember you made the appointment."

"What the soldier said is not evidence," retorted Travers dryly. Then he looked straight at the other and his eyes twinkled. "I know you're going to take this the right way so I'll own up. I was *not* at Gregorio's last night."

Franklin who had expected the confession to be the other way about, was beginning to gather,

somewhat hazily, that there was a catch in it somewhere. "I'll give it up. What's the answer?"

"What I told you. I wasn't there."

"Then whom did I see?"

"Palmer."

"Palmer?"

"That's right. He's the same height as myself but slightly fatter. Put my big ulster on him and button it tightly and he's the same. Then give him my glasses and stoop; add four or five rehearsals and that Roland du Fresne, who doesn't come on till the second act, was round here making Palmer up and supervising the dress-rehearsal so to speak, and there we are. Add further that you never came within ten yards of my double and that the lights weren't all on, and what chance had you?"

Franklin took it very well. "Precious little apparently! Well I'd have sworn——"

"Of course you would. The disguise was perfect and not enough grease paint to cover a sixpence. We tried it out with George the porter and he gulped it down. And that reminds me. Have a drink."

"Only just swallowed the last. Do you mind if I congratulate Palmer?"

"He did put up an awfully good show," said Travers. "You sure you don't mind us behaving so disgracefully?"

"Not a bit. I rather enjoyed it. But there's one thing I would like to know and it rather discounts the acknowledgement. Just *why* did you do it?"

"To tell you the truth," said Travers, "the first idea was to prove the easiness with which Frank Richleigh might have employed a confederate.

Just as you'd have sworn to my whereabouts last night, so people may have sworn to his."

"There'd still remain to find that confederate."

"Oh I know you can knock holes in it. I knew that before I did the damn-fool thing. But there was another reason. I was getting impatient. I knew you'd like to know I *was* impatient so I lured you round here by means of a little comic relief. I really do mean relief, by the way. I know there's plenty of work to do and I know you're like me; can't rest while it's there. And now you're here—you see I don't give you a chance to reply—what's the news from Muffley Hill?"

"I've spent a few days there. In some ways I'm satisfied with striking while the iron was hot."

"Anything happen?"

"It all depends. For instance there was that disclosure about Richleigh losing his money a year or two ago. Also exactly at half term the headmaster received his resignation."

"Why the 'exactly'?"

"Well, it fitted in so precisely. He had to give a half term's notice and on the date—November the 3rd—he couldn't have known that his uncle had died intestate. If he did, it must have been close work and the date of the murder fitted remarkably well."

"That what strikes me most about the whole business," said Travers. "Everything goes according to schedule. Everything for Frank Richleigh turns out the best in this best of all worlds. He hasn't even troubled about coming back to England. *Il a de la chance; ce jeune homme-là!*"

"A damn sight too much luck for my liking,"

said Franklin. "The one man who gets the most out of it did *not* commit the murder."

"What else did you find out?"

"Not much really. Still it was curious how everybody in his profession spoke badly of him and everybody outside it liked him and spoke well about him. I saw a good many people too; his landlady again, his tobacconist, the school groundsman, some of the senior boys, and his doctor."

"How on earth did you manage that?"

"Called to see him with an attack of indigestion. I couldn't very well give him an address and it looked rather curious when I paid him on the spot. I got the conversation round to my old friend Richleigh whom I'd just seen in the South of France. "Best place for him," said the doctor. "Really?" said I, and that's all there was to it. I couldn't very well drag him in again and so bang went five bob."

"Didn't get your money's worth?"

"Can't say yet. Then I saw the headmaster on the plea that Richleigh had mentioned to me that he might possibly be free at Christmas and I thought of taking him on as private secretary! He was about the most pompous old ass I've ever struck and simply seething because Richleigh had got his notice in first."

"He was definitely going to dismiss him then?"

"So he hinted. So did the other man, Walton, whom I told you about. But it sounded fishy to me. Something else I got from a man in the Common Room is rather interesting. You know the tone of that first 'Marius' letter; how generally superior and ironical it is and I told you about Richleigh's

sarcastic tongue. Here's another example. Richleigh was sitting by himself in the corner when he suddenly said to the music master—poisonous sort of chap called Jenston—"What was that you were playing to the Fourth this morning, Jenston?" "A man of your tastes ought to have known," was the reply. "But if you want to know, it was the 'War March of the Priests.'" "Sorry," said Richleigh. "I thought it was a procession of the unemployed." I may be wrong but the more I think about it the more I place Richleigh as the writer of that letter."

"Hm! Anything else about Richleigh's temperamental make up?"

"I don't know that there was. Oh yes; there was one other thing. According to the head, Richleigh had the very devil of a temper. You couldn't see a sign of it except a sort of quiet, white-hot smoulder. He'd never known him actually lose his temper once and that was in his very last term."

"What was that about?" asked Travers. "You mustn't mind my pestering you like this but I do think we can't hear too much of Richleigh from every conceivable angle. What did he lose his temper about?"

"Something perfectly stupid, at least it seemed so to me. This chap Jenston called him a certain nickname in the Common Room and Richleigh knocked him tail over tip. The Head heard about it; quite by accident, so he persisted."

"Wonder what the nickname was?" asked Travers, almost to himself.

Franklin told him.

Then a surprising thing happened. Travers sat up with a jerk. "Do you mind saying that again?"

Franklin repeated it. Travers rubbed the pebbles of his glasses with a vigour that threatened disaster. But he did not blink. His eyes remained tightly closed. Then he sprang up and fetched the photos. He held that of Frank Richleigh to the light for a good half minute and then what he said seemed little to the purpose. "Fancy not remembering that! Here's a crossword puzzle for you. Find the name of the murderer in nine letters. And the answer's not 'Richleigh.' "

Franklin gave it up.

"I'm sorry," said Travers. "Perhaps I was going too quickly. Here's something easier. Richleigh was a teacher of mathematics. Wouldn't he know that things which are equal to the same thing are equal to one another?"

Franklin still looked puzzled.

"I expect you think I'm mad," said Travers. Then he gave that rare smile of his. "I've got to think about it. It's no use diving off the deep end. Could you come round to breakfast in the morning? Say about 8.0?"

"I certainly can," said Franklin, watching the other's face in an attempt to find some clue to the tremendous thing that had so startled Travers and galvanised him into action. "You found something good?"

"For breakfast?" and they both smiled. "About the usual. There may be something extra but don't count on it."

And with that Franklin had to be content.

CHAPTER XX

SPADE WORK

"I HAD to sleep on it," said Travers. "It was a question of appealing from Travers drunk to Travers sober. When it struck me suddenly last night and I realised whom Richleigh's photograph reminded me of, it looked a certainty that the answer to that cross-word puzzle was 'Gene Allen.' What it looks like this morning you've just heard. And you really think we can go ahead?"

"I'm bursting to start now," said Franklin. "This bit of investigating may be a gamble but it's something you can get your teeth into."

"How do you propose starting?"

"Well, there seem several methods of approach. We've got to find out who got that job. You say the queue you saw was a big one?"

"I should say that roughly a couple of hundred men were lined up and a dozen more arrived while I was actually there. That's no guide of course to the final numbers but I imagine all the serious applicants would be early birds."

"The two main lines I thought of were to see if a man of the type asked for happens to be missing, and also identification of the man by means of the queue."

"Don't you think the first will be frightfully difficult? What I mean is this. Suppose you had been picking out a man for the purpose. You get

from the queue a final selection of three or four, all reasonably well qualified. Everything else being equal, what would be your final test? Surely lack of relatives or dependents who might make inquiries in case of disappearance?"

"That does seem to be so," admitted Franklin. "Still, Potter could get on with that."

"As for the other," suggested Travers, "I think I can save you some time. Why not consult all the files of the Press for photographs? Some enterprising photographer would surely have taken that queue. Then try the art departments of the papers. Above all, go to the three principal publishers of Film Gazettes; I'll give you the addresses of their offices by the way. See if any of their men took that queue. Get all the pictures you can; make enlarged facsimiles of the heads and then go to the film studios and try to get identification. Stage managers, theatrical agents and stage door keepers ought to produce something."

"Is it worth while trying to find out at the same time if any actual film company did insert that advertisement? If it should happen to be a genuine one the whole theory'll be upset."

"Why not? After all it's no use working on a false hypothesis. But if they didn't, by that much more we're nearer the mark. I'll give you a list of companies in half an hour. I imagine there are no private concerns."

When Franklin got to Durango House he had visited the advertisement departments of four of the dailies which had printed the advertisement. In each case the records showed that a typewritten communication had been received, with the neces-

sary payment for two appearances. There was no heading except the name of the office and the signature read—

F. W. BUNTING,
(Manager).

and below in a bracket—

Comedy Films Limited.

It was the custom to accept small ads. of that type for the "Men Wanted" column without any check, except in obviously peculiar circumstances. The machine used was *not* a Rolland Portable.

The list of the registered companies made Franklin whistle. Seventeen of them! And Comedy Films Limited *not* included; an omission that solved the problem of the genuineness of the advertisement. Three men were forthwith set to work at compilation of photographs from the Press. The three companies that published gazettes, Franklin proposed to interview himself and a long and trying business it turned out to be.

From the fact that all had offices in Wardour Street he had anticipated a minimum of trouble, whereas of the thousands of feet of film actually taken to cut down unto those five minute gazettes he had no idea. The rest of the day was spent with one company only, and it involved a visit to the studio mortuary at Reigate and the running over miles of film. The actual shot had not been considered of sufficient topical interest to incorporate in either of the bi-weekly editions and a series of events of more importance had helped to crowd it out. But the important thing was that Franklin obtained some really superb pictures. For the immediate present therefore he intended to leave

the other two companies alone and work with the material at hand, especially as he was assured that other shots by different companies would in all probability have covered the same ground.

While Potter and his colleagues began the round of the cinema studios, armed with enlarged fac-similes, Franklin spent a day in tracing back from the office address. The room in which the interviews had actually taken place was a shop, the lease of which had expired. The agents—Harkness and Co. of Bedford Gardens—had let this lock-up shop to the special inquirer who gave his name as F. W. Bunting.

Asked for a description, the clerk gave what sounded like a cross between Rudolph Valentino and an anarchist. He had worn a very wide, felt hat, horn rims and side whiskers. He limped slightly, had a pronounced stutter and spoke in a high-pitched voice. He had worn yellow gloves which he kept on while signing the agreement. Harkness and Co. did not know the man whom their tenant had employed as commissionaire for his queue. They did not even know the purpose for which the shop had been used. They did know that the key had been returned a day before the expiration of the agreement and that the shop and its annexe were in perfect order.

"How much was the rent for the week?" asked Franklin.

"Twenty guineas," replied the clerk calmly.

Franklin gave an involuntary start of surprise. "And how did he pay for it?"

"Cash down. Treasury notes."

Franklin departed with many thanks and a trac-

ing of the signature of F. W. Bunting. He was not surprised to find that there was no resemblance whatever to the writing of F. C. Richleigh which he had got from a chit in the headmaster's desk.

In two days' time there was found a man who had not only lined up in the queue but had also entered the magic door. He was moreover able to give information which led to the finding of others. According to him he had entered from the side door in the passage a room unfurnished except for a curtain hung across the front window, a chair, and a table at which sat a Spanish-looking gentleman. The light was not at all good. The instructions and questions received by him were approximately these.

Name?

Address?

Married?

Stage or film experience?

Teetotaler?

Turn face to the light. (Suddenly flashed on.)

Now profile.

During these last two there was some examination of and comparison with what were probably photographs. The whole proceeding took no more than three minutes. The man at the table then said in rather a high-pitched voice, "Thank you Mr. X. If you are wanted you will be told not later than to-morrow. Through that door please."

The applicant then passed through a kind of annexe into a court which led direct to Holborn. Two men he knew had gone through but he did not catch them up. As far as Franklin could judge, this particular applicant bore a considerable likeness to those photos of Gene Allen which he had been

able to obtain. He was married with three children, had had both stage and film experience but had frankly confessed he was not a teetotaler.

An examination of certain other members of that queue produced some interesting evidence. Some of the applicants had been rejected almost immediately. The procedure varied apparently with the degree of resemblance to the required type. A man whose claim depended on temporary distortion of features and accessories of clothing was not asked the first three questions. He was simply and frankly told he was not of the type required.

Some of the men were moreover shown a photograph of Richleigh which Franklin had adorned with side whiskers and horn rims. Most of them identified it at once with the man at the table. Franklin was for a moment inclined to be triumphant till a little sober reflection tempered his jubilation. From a shop he obtained photographs of the late Rudolph Valentino, Owen Nares and Forbes Robertson. These he adorned in a similar way and then tried identification. The results were what he feared. So much for the magic of horn rims and side whiskers.

Something else that came to light was that at about 11.30 that morning the queue had suddenly been moved forward at a quicker pace. The applicants had been passed through the room, subject to a rapid inspection, at the rate of two a minute. Then, just after noon a large card appeared in the window.

The position advertised for has been filled.
No further applications can be entertained
either to-day or to-morrow.

All this took several days and then at last the clue came. Potter found at Elstree a man who had important news to tell and promptly handed him over to his chief to deal with. The tale he told Franklin was this.

His name was Arthur Lester and in the course of his career he had done comedy turns in pierrot troupes, run a show on the halls and worked for the International Film Company at Elstree. He had seen the advertisement for an actor to take Gene Allen parts and having the gift of facial manipulation, had thought a long shot worth attempting. Having determined to be at the head of the queue he breakfasted early in Holborn and in the same restaurant met a man with whom he had worked before—Frederick Price, a quiet chap and a good sort generally. Price owned up to his intentions; indeed, as Lester admitted, his chance was a good one. At the studios his nickname was Gene and he had more than once filled in a waiting interval with really good imitations.

When the two arrived however at 8.0 a.m. there were at least forty in front of them. Still they fell in and made at the same time a definite agreement that they should afterwards meet in the restaurant and compare notes. When their turn came to enter Lester went first. His bluff was speedily called and he passed out into the courtyard. There he waited for a quarter of an hour but Price did not appear. When he did not turn up at the restaurant he decided that it was useless to wait longer. In his opinion Price had got the job. In any case he had neither heard anything of him or seen him since. As far as he could recollect, the last job Price

had had was in the summer with Clifford Cartwright's Entertainers who had toured the west coast.

All this information which Franklin paid for handsomely, seemed well worth the money. The next thing to do was to get Clifford Cartwright's office from the telephone directory. There he obtained the address of Price as 11 Marshall's Avenue, Camden Town.

Hot on the trail Franklin rushed off by practically the next bus. He knocked at the door and asked the elderly woman who opened it if he could see Mrs. Price. He was told that he had made a mistake. Her husband's name was Sheffield. No, the people on the second floor were not called Price; their name was Rogers. She herself had been there only a short time and who the people were who had had the flat before her she didn't know. She thought however the name *was* Price, now she came to think of it. The side door if he wanted the top flat.

The Rogers family appeared to be all in and having tea. Mrs. Rogers knew Mrs. Price quite well; a quiet little woman from the country. She hadn't been married many years and had no children. Mr. Price hadn't been to the flat for some days before his wife left. She had sold up the furniture and gone away; to some place in Norfolk she believed. Pressed to recall the place she was unable to do so but thought she would recognise it if she heard it. Franklin tried the few places he knew then went out and bought a cycling map. Mrs. Rogers put her finger on the spot at once—Thetford.

Asked if she knew why Mrs. Price had gone away, she said she didn't know but had a shrewd suspicion. She had seen her crying and putting two and two together had concluded that her husband had left her. She admitted that she knew Mr. Price was an actor and frequently away on tour but all the same she had thought it peculiar.

Franklin refused to celebrate. He told himself that at the best he had merely unearthed a promising trail. There was nothing discovered yet that would be of the least value in a court of law. Richleigh himself was at the moment wholly unconnected with what discoveries had been made. But he did ring through to Ludovic Travers.

"Where did you say this Mrs. Price had gone to?"

"Thetford. Little town in Norfolk." He almost added, "Do you know it?" but remembered in time the weird extensiveness of his listener's knowledge.

"Thetford! That's very unusual. Look here; if you can wait till after an early lunch to-morrow and will let me come along, I'll run you down in the car."

Franklin jumped at the chance and the next day saw the pair of them leaving the "Bell" yard for the last piece of spade work. The ostler had had no knowledge of a Mrs. Price so they tried the post office. No postmen were available but one of the clerks on duty happened to have some idea.

"If the mother's a widow it'll probably be one of those cottage-villas on the Euston Road. I should try the first one and ask there."

Off again then for the very last lap. Franklin knocked at the door of the tiny villa and there

opened it a woman of less than thirty years, in white blouse and dark skirt.

Franklin lifted his hat. "Would you mind telling me where a Mrs. Price lives?"

The woman looked at him strangely; a look intent and nervous. Then her gaze wandered to the taller figure in the background. Her reply, when it came, was a fitting end to the long search.

"I am Mrs. Price."

Then she waited.

CHAPTER XXI

A PUZZLE IS SOLVED

(A)

FRANKLIN hesitated too. What he might have to tell this sad-faced woman would be difficult for him and tragic for her. But exactly what he was to learn was furthest from his thoughts.

"May we come in, Mrs. Price? We hope to have some news for you."

She gave a quick start and made as if to ask a question. Then she let her hand fall to her side and drew back to let them pass.

In the living room the furniture was of the simple, country type; windsor chairs, oak bureau, deal dresser and kitchen table covered with a green cloth. The kettle was steaming on the hob and before the fire a cat was lying on the home-made rug. On the mantelpiece two brass candlesticks shone white as silver and between them were a Staffordshire figure and a copper lustre goblet. In a wicker chair sat an elderly woman, darning stockings by the late light of the window behind her.

"Do put that away mother," said Mrs. Price. "You know your eyes are bad enough as it is. Here's some gentlemen who say they've got some news for us."

The mother too looked startled when she saw the

strangers. She hastily put down her work and got to her feet.

"Now don't you go running away, mother," said her daughter, rather petulantly it seemed to Franklin. "Will you sit down, Mr. ——"

"My name's Franklin and this is Mr. Travers. I think we *will* sit down if you don't mind, because what there is to say may take a long time." He saw the growing alarm on their faces and added quickly, "But I don't want you to think it's anything serious. As a matter of fact I want you to help me."

"I'll go and make a cup of tea, Milly," said Mrs. Wilford.

"You stop here, mother," said the other firmly. "And light the lamp mother." And then to Franklin, "Is it about my husband?"

"It is, but nothing serious I hope. I shall be glad if your mother would stay. Mrs. Wilford isn't it? They gave us your name and address at the post office."

"That's right. Milly—Mrs. Price—is my only one," and she sat up stiffly in her chair, making a brave concealment of her disquiet.

"If I might explain this visit," said Franklin, "perhaps you'll understand better. I happen to be a private enquiry agent, Mrs. Price, and nothing to do with your husband. But I did happen to discover that a man I'm looking for had employed your husband and that both had disappeared together. From a friend of your husband I got your address at Camden Town and then from Mrs. Rogers of the top flat I got your whereabouts as Thetford. Now you see what I want. If you can tell me where

to find your husband, I shall probably find the man I'm looking for."

"I don't know where my husband is. I haven't seen him or heard a word for weeks."

"I'm sorry to hear that. Please don't think, Mrs. Price, or you Mrs. Wilford, that I want to inquire into any private business. I know little about Mr. Price and want to know nothing that's secret in any way. All I'm very anxious to do is to find the man who employed him."

The tears came with a rush to Milly's eyes and in a moment she was sobbing quietly. "Please, Mrs. Price . . . Oh, I'm sorry," stammered Franklin and turned to Travers helplessly. The mother came quickly across and put her hands on her shoulders. "There dear! Don't worry. Don't cry now," and to Franklin, "She'll be all right in a minute sir. It was rather a shock after all that time."

The sobbing slowly ceased and Milly dried her eyes. Then she spoke. "Show the gentleman that letter, mother. It's in my bag."

Mrs. Wilford fetched it. "Would you like a cup of tea sir? I'm just going to make one."

"Thank you Mrs. Wilford. I should, very much. I expect we all should like one." And while the mother set about it, he read the letter. Then he handed it over to Travers. But neither could make head nor tail of it.

"Who is the 'Aggie' to whom your husband is writing?" asked Travers.

"That's what I'd like to know," was the determined answer. "Some woman or other who got him in a mess. And she's welcome to him for all I care."

"When did you actually see your husband last,

Mrs. Price?" asked Franklin.

"When was it, mother? About the end of August I think. He'd got back from a tour which hadn't done very well and they said there'd be at least a month before anything else was on. Then he saw an advertisement in the papers and said he was going to try that."

"What was the advertisement, do you know?"

"I don't know. He never used to talk things like that over with me for fear it should make me worry if he didn't get it."

"He was a good husband?"

"Oh yes; he was everything he could be, and no wonder when he had that other woman. I never saw him after that day. Then in about a week a letter came saying he thought he'd got a job up north but he had to keep it quiet. And he gave me an address I could write to and the letter had ten pounds in it. Then I thought I'd go along and see this address and when I got there it was only a tobacconist's near the 'Elephant' where they took in letters. Then a few days later another letter came with ten pounds in it and it was full of all sorts of rubbish and I couldn't make head nor tail of it and I was so angry I threw it in the fire. And then I didn't hear any more till this letter came and that had twenty pounds in it. Mother sent it on from here. The other one came here too."

"What did you think when you got it?" asked Franklin.

"What would you have thought? He'd got hold of another woman and put the letters in the wrong envelopes."

"Your husband was well educated?"

"He went to a grammar school, didn't he, mother? And he was always reading."

"What sort of books?"

"Oh, silly detective novels. He had them on the brain. I used to hate them. Never talking when he was home and always sitting over the fire with a book!"

"Do come and have your tea," broke in Mrs. Wilford. "It's all getting cold."

"Excuse me one minute," said Franklin, passing the envelope to Travers, "but might I point out something? I expect it's really of no consequence at all but why is the envelope addressed to *Miss Price*?"

Mrs. Wilford abandoned the pouring-out and came over. The two women took the envelope to the light and pored over it.

"Do you know, Milly," exclaimed Mrs. Wilford, "I really think the gentleman is right. I never noticed it."

The daughter was puzzled and with good reason. "You'd never see anything with your eyes, mother. But what did he want to do that for? He hadn't got any sisters—or brothers."

"Don't pay any attention to it," said Travers, seeing that tears were dangerously close. "If you write quickly, there often isn't any difference between 'Mrs.' and 'Miss'. You expected to see 'Mrs.' and to all intents and purposes it was."

They moved over to the table and both men tried to turn the conversation into other channels. There are simple, country people, uneducated and humbly bred, who acquire unknowingly a natural dignity. Such a woman was Mrs. Wilford.

"I suppose you're a native of this part?" asked Travers.

"Oh yes sir; I've lived here all my life."

"Really! Then I expect you know Hainton?"

She smiled at her daughter who smiled back. "I ought to sir. I was parlourmaid at the vicarage before I married."

"I say; that's extraordinary!" exclaimed Travers. "I spent most of my holidays there when I was a boy. Geoffrey Wrentham and I went to school together."

"Well now, that *is* funny, sir. This Mr. Wrentham's father was vicar in my time. But I remember Mr. Geoffrey being born, sir."

With that the stiffness vanished from the conversation. But for all that, Franklin could see that from the daughter's mind there was never long absent the object of his visit, and with it a fear and a dread.

When they rose to go he had a favour to ask. "May I take a copy of that letter, Mrs. Price?"

She glanced at her mother. "If you look after it and send it back you may take it with you."

"You can rely on that," said Franklin, putting it away carefully in his pocket-book. Then he had a last question to put.

"I hardly like to ask you this, Mrs. Price, but perhaps you'll forgive me. I've heard a lot about your husband, and everybody spoke well of him. Will you take my word for it that there's more in this letter than meets the eye? Tell me; did you ever know your husband do what the world calls a dirty trick?"

She shook her head.

"Did he ever give you reason to suspect he was carrying on with another woman? I mean, did you trust him and he you?"

She made a gesture of assent and the tears came into her eyes. Franklin would trust himself no further. He glanced at Travers and the two of them said good-bye. But at the door there was still another word.

"We're more than grateful to you Mrs. Price. Don't lose heart. We shall find your husband and when we do, all this will be cleared up. This time next year she'll be laughing to think how worried she was; won't she, Mrs. Wilford?"

The mother took the hint. "I hope so sir, from what you've told us."

But as they made their way back to the town, neither was feeling very cheerful. The kindly hospitality, the simple courtesies of that small home hurt like the pain from a blow. The amplitude of the information received made everything worse. One day, and both knew it as surely as if the event had already happened, it would be the lot of somebody to visit again that small home and leave behind him a woman with a grief that might be beyond even the relief of tears.

(B)

"A pitiful business," said Travers. "I might be unconcerned about the removal of a man like Thomas Richleigh, but this second murder! Those women too. Wonder what they've got to live on?"

We shall have to see about that, Franklin," and he made a hasty note.

Franklin stared almost morosely into the fire. Ostensibly he had stayed on for a short talk and a nightcap; in reality the talk had lasted an hour and that in spite of the conversation during the long journey home and the meal that followed it. In his hand he held the letter and on the table between them lay the envelope and a powerful reading glass.

"Have we got any further? That's the problem. Price took that job, that's a certainty; but have we any evidence that connects Richleigh in any way?"

"Not a ha'p'orth," said Travers. "Tags don't help much either or I'd say, 'Rome wasn't built in a day.' And things have worked out better than we could reasonably have expected."

"I admit you're positive, and so am I. The thing that gets me is why Price should have been such a fool as to put those letters in the wrong envelopes."

"If he did. From what you've told me and the direct answer his wife gave to that very pointed question of yours, the thought of Price and amorous adventures don't go well together. What I want to know is, why did he send two letters *via* his mother-in-law and not direct?"

"My opinion," said Franklin, "is that he knew his wife would be worried and anxious and he'd assume she'd go down to the country for a bit with her mother. The money he sent would last a long while in a small town like that. Sending the letter to Norfolk made delivery a certainty. If she were there she'd get it, and if she weren't, her mother would be sure to send it on."

"But why the 'Miss'? We're both agreed it reads like that."

Franklin was suddenly alert. "I've got it. You remember the question put by F. W. Bunting? 'Are you married?'" Price gathered from the tone of the voice that if he wanted that job he'd better say, 'No'. But he had to write to his wife at all costs and so, on the spur of the moment, he invented an unmarried sister."

"That's it," agreed Travers. "But why didn't he write to his wife and explain? He might have given her the most emphatic cautions as to secrecy."

"Ask me another. Perhaps he gave his word and like a fool, stuck to it. Perhaps the rewards were too high to risk. After all he sent his wife quite a lot of money in a very short time. He must have been getting what was for him a fortune."

"Everything might be true," said Travers, "but where does Richleigh come in? Let's have another look at that letter."

Dear Aggie,

I was very glad to get your letter——

"But he hadn't had one! Of course he'd have to make that up to explain the second letter."

"But he couldn't make it up," said Franklin. "If he got a reply to his first letter it meant that he'd have given her an address. What he probably did was to write himself an answer in a faked handwriting and send it to the address where he'd been told his sister might write to."

"I don't know," said Travers. "We shall have to

A PUZZLE IS SOLVED

get far more information before we can reconstruct all that's behind those letters. What's next?"

. . . but sorry to hear about your rheumatism. If you take my advice you will on no account do as you suggest; go and stay with Tom's wife. Stuck down in the mud as it is, Great Oxley is no good for rheumatism . . .

"Now why the devil does he write all that screed about rheumatism?"

"Why not go down to Great Oxley and find out a few things?" suggested Franklin.

"Just a minute; I've thought of something!" and Travers sprang up and went to the library. In two minutes he was back.

"There's no town, village or hamlet in the British Isles of that name. Now let's look again."

They spread out the separated portions and on the back Travers put a strip or two of adhesive paper to keep the letters in true alignment. And then the discovery was made.

. . . Great Oxley is no good for rheumatism and nobody could ever . . .

"We've got it ! Look at the initial letters of those words! GOING FRANCE."

The two looked at each other in startled surprise. Then the heads went down again. Travers ran his finger along till something else appeared—

. . . cure all rheumatic cases and so surely one needn't expect . . .

"Should have been two 'n's'," said Travers, "but that doesn't matter. Any more?"

The words went on again, pronounced with a grim impressiveness, until once more a message spelt itself.

. . . news ought to make a real record if everything doesn't . . .

"Good God!" exclaimed Franklin and then was speechless.

"We'll try it again," said Travers, "and in reverse this time as well. No wonder the glass showed no secret marks."

But nothing else came to light. Travers wrote down the words—

GOING FRANCE. CARCASSON (N)E. NOT MARRIED.

and handed them to Franklin. "I'd give fifty pounds to see that letter full of rubbish which Mrs. Price put on the fire. It's a thousand to one it explained all the earlier happenings and it might even have explained this very letter."

"If Price hadn't been too clever he might have been alive to-day. Perhaps I'm unjust; if he hadn't been too honest."

Travers shook his head. "There's still plenty we don't understand. Why did Price write the letter, do you think?"

Franklin thought for a moment. "For some extraordinary and binding reason, Price gave his word that he would communicate with nobody. Then

when he came to think it over he knew his wife would be in a fearful state of worry. So he risked a very guarded letter and also told her where to write to. Then he had no answer to this letter and at the same time got the wind up about writing another in the same way. So he approached his employer and asked if he might write to his sister in Norfolk, provided the employer saw the letter and, probably, posted it. In the meanwhile the sums of money he sent were guarantees to his wife of his good faith. Then he wanted to write again, so he did what was just suggested; that is wrote himself a letter to the permitted address, perhaps even to the employer himself. It would contain the remarks about rheumatism to which he refers. Then he got permission to answer it. Also he must have expected his wife to find out the hidden messages. If she were asked she might remember some private clue connected with the nickname 'Aggie.' Perhaps it was a joke they had some time or other. He certainly got the idea from a detective story and if we could find the actual one we might get something else out of it. That's the best I can do."

"If I'd been Price's employer," said Travers. "I'd have been rather pleased about posting that letter. It says everything that would allay suspicion. 'Don't worry.' 'May be going abroad.' 'Turn up like a bad penny,' and so on."

Franklin looked at his watch. "I say; its getting rather late. What about coming round very early in the morning?"

"Why not have a shakedown here? Palmer can fix you up. I suppose no one will worry if you don't turn up at your own place?"

"I think I will if you don't mind. Now then; what about going into the question of the sort of hold that his employer had over Price? Then we might start a general re-construction of the whole thing."

"We might start off by referring to Price's employer as Richleigh. The mention of Carcassonne leaves no doubt about that. Now let's see. What sort of a hold *might* he have had over him?"

And so the argument began all over again. When it was settled moreover, there still had to be a summary written, ready for presentation in the morning. And lastly, in spite of the lateness of the hour, Travers wrote a letter, and the address on the envelope was—

Rev. P. Wrentham,
The Vicarage,
Hainton,
Norwich.

CHAPTER XXII

THE DECKS ARE CLEARED

(A)

It was nine o'clock the following morning before Franklin had finished his recital of those events which had ended so dramatically the previous night. Sir Francis Weston, whose worst enemy would not have denied him the possession of a keen imagination, was startled and impressed. He agreed that the case must be finished, however long it took to obtain the evidence, circumstantial or otherwise, that would be needed to convince a jury.

"The only criticism I have to offer," he said, "is that the evidence lacks correlation. Was Frank Richleigh F. W. Bunting for example? What did Price actually do after he met Richleigh? Where did the conspirators meet? Get more evidence on those points and there's a case to present."

"A perfectly just objection," agreed Franklin, "but I think you'll admit one thing, sir. When the message was unravelled from the letter it definitely connected Price with Richleigh. The dates and the word Carcassonne showed that."

"I agree," was the reply. "But as I said, if you remember, from the point of view of the average jury. I think you're right; I'd bet a good many pounds you're right, but I'd bet the same amount that a jury wouldn't convict. Now about that other

matter. You both agree that we've sufficient case to present to Scotland Yard?"

"Subject to the stipulations mentioned, I'm sure it would be the correct thing," said Franklin. "We give them a certain amount to do, which they alone can do, and moreover we don't antagonise them."

"What do you think, Travers?"

"Speaking as a layman, Sir Francis, I agree."

But when the company reassembled after breakfast, it was Chief-Constable Scott and not Superintendent Wharton who made the fourth. He seemed remarkably cordial; perhaps a shade more affable with Travers than with Franklin, but that was to be expected.

"Chief-Constable Scott agrees," said Sir Francis, "that the evidence I've just sketched out to him has extraordinary possibilities. The very reasonable conditions I've laid down—I say 'very reasonable' gentlemen, because it isn't often one gets the chance of blackmailing the law—well, they're agreed to. Should the evidence turn out all that we expect it, the rewards offered by the press will be paid over to Mr. Franklin."

"If I might say something, Sir Francis——"

"Do please."

"I would like to admit, and Mr. Travers agrees, that this case has so far been solved entirely by luck. There was no question of competing with Scotland Yard. We merely adopted an independent line of research and happened to have a lucky hit."

"That's very handsomely said," confessed Scott. "But in justice to yourselves I ought to add that in my experience luck and hard work were never far off each other."

"I think we ought to take this easily gentlemen," said Sir Francis, and pushed the cigar box across the table. "But there is one thing we would like you to do, Mr. Franklin, and that is to read over again the statement you read to me."

"Very good; but of course you'll recognise that it's merely a very faint outline. This is the statement sir, that Mr. Travers and I agreed upon last night."

There came a time in his life when Frank Richleigh realised one or two unpleasant things about the work he was doing. He disliked it, he was out of tune with his headmaster and his colleagues, and English winters, combined with sedentary work, were too great a strain on his health. He thought occasionally of the difference there would be when his uncle died. His own money and savings had been lost in an unlucky investment, but if things went well he might count on a legacy that would bring him in best part of £500 a year.

Moreover he detested that uncle. He probably had an enormous shock when he first heard of the liaison with the housekeeper. That meant that he might have to go on working in that school for another twenty years . . .

"Excuse me a second," interrupted Scott. "Why shouldn't he have gone to another school?"

"Impossible!" replied Franklin. "He was what they call, a man on his maximum. According to the findings of a committee——"

"The Burnham Award," said Travers.

"The findings of this Burnham Committee, he was entitled to a certain salary, say in his case, £500 a year. If a headmaster wants a new man he gets him straight from the university or with only a year or so of experience, and so saves at least two hundred a year. That is why Richleigh realised he might have to go on working under the same conditions."

The money moreover which he and his brothers considered should have been theirs at the death of their uncle Peter, would now go to a woman of unquestionable vulgarity. He lived an introspective sort of life and brooded over all this until the idea of murdering his uncle got hold of his mind. The impending marriage with the housekeeper was one deciding factor; the fortuitous occurrence of his grace term was another.

How he got the idea of impersonation—from a book, the cinema or a press illustration—we don't know. He certainly had the idea in his mind when a colleague nicknamed him Gene Allen. At any rate he realised how lucky he was. If any of us wanted a double we could never find one, at least without the use of greasepaint. But Richleigh discovered that he was the living image of that celebrated film comedian, Gene Allen. His common sense and his mathematics would tell him that things which are equal to the same thing are equal to one another. All he had to do therefore was to set about finding an actor who also resembled Gene Allen. Later came certain diabolically clever modifications so that the alibi would

THE DECKS ARE CLEARED

never be tested on people who could never make a mistake. The scene for instance of the test, was laid in an out-of-the-way corner of France and as Price spoke no other French than what Richleigh put into his mouth, there would be no worry about voice.

Well, Richleigh inserted his advertisement and was lucky enough to find in Price a man who surpassed his expectations. He was keen on pleasing and most conscientious. When Richleigh got him to himself he said. "Now Mr. Price; this advertisement was a blind. You are really wanted by the Secret Service and you were chosen specially because you resemble a man whom the Government want to keep an eye on. But first you will have to undergo a period of training and from now on everything you do must be secret as the grave. You say you have no relatives except a sister. If you ever want to communicate with anybody, even with her, I must be told all about it and every letter must be censored by me."

After that Richleigh set about Price's training. He probably said to him, "The money is good but you've got to earn it. The Secret Service has eyes everywhere, though the man in the street thinks that all bunkum. If ever a single word gets out to a single soul of what you're doing you'll be dropped like a hot potato. But if you do make good, there's nothing you won't be able to ask for. Now then; go to a certain place and do so and so. Bring a report of all that happens. And don't forget that though you can't see what's behind the apparently absurd things you'll have

to do, yet there's really something definite in them which only your superiors know."

He kept that up for weeks. He'd even go himself sometimes on expeditions with his pupil. He made sure that Price would carry out any instructions, however absurd, to the very last stroke of the very last letter, dressed in any clothes that were ordered and under any name. There would be heaps of flummery and bluff and the pay would be gradually increased. Price was so trusted that he was allowed to write to his sister. Richleigh tried him out till failure was absolutely impossible. Then, wishing to show how clever he was, he wrote the "Marius" letter.

You will note one thing all this time. Throughout the whole of the amazing proceedings Richleigh could have drawn back at any time, even a minute before the murder, and there would have been nothing thought except that the affair was a hoax after all. If he hadn't committed the murder, there would merely have been some excuse to make in order to dismiss Price after his return from France.

But Richleigh proceeded with the scheme. He sent Price to France, probably telling him that he was about to begin the highly important and confidential mission for which he had originally been chosen. He was to assume the name of Frank Richleigh, and as the passport system was abolished last year, there was no difficulty about that. He received the most detailed instructions as to movements but above all, on the night of the 11th he was to be at Limoux. At about 8.0 the following night he was to be at a certain spot

THE DECKS ARE CLEARED

near Couiza, where he was to be joined by a messenger. All through the trip, and most especially on the 11th, he was to note with faultless accuracy everything that occurred, even to the minutest detail, and record it in his diary. He was given an outfit the exact duplicate of that which Richleigh intended to wear himself.

Then Richleigh left the hotel and went elsewhere till the night of the murder. Even when he entered the dining-room at The Grove he could still draw back. If his device of the silk stockings had failed and the maid had seen him, he could have explained it away. But once the murder was committed he had at all costs to avoid being seen. That's why he left by the window. Then he caught the train for France and, assuming some easy disguise, reached Carcassone and took a car for Couiza, ready for his appointment with Price.

The latter was overjoyed to find that the expected messenger was his immediate superior in the Secret Service. He told all that had happened, down to the very last detail—sore heel, coffee, Marcelle, and so on. Then Richleigh told him that the next stage was for him to carry on and that it was necessary to change clothes. Then Richleigh killed him, concealed the body and went on to the inn at Couiza. His alibi was perfect. And once in the inn he studied the diary for the rest of the necessary details to make it bombproof.

"Thank you," said Scott. "I think that puts it very clearly. Now would you mind giving

me the exact time when the train arrives at Carcassonne."

"About 19.10. There's no local train for Couiza after that so Richleigh would have had to take a car. It's about 46 kilometres; say 30 miles, and that would be a good hour. Say he arrived for the meeting with Price at about 8.30 p.m."

"At what time did Price leave Limoux and at what time did Richleigh arrive at Couiza?"

"I'm afraid I don't know. All I did was to verify the alibi."

"Now then, I put it to you. Wasn't 8.30 very late for that meeting? There was the preliminary talk when they met, the changing of clothes, the murder, the concealment of the body and other things we may not know. That would have made Richleigh's arrival at the inn very late; so late as to have called attention to it."

"If you don't mind my butting in," said Travers, "I'd like to say there's a daily service of planes from Paris to Toulouse. If Richleigh had travelled by air he'd have arrived at Carcassonne in the early afternoon."

"You quite sure about that——?" began Sir Francis and Scott together.

"Perfectly. When Mr. Franklin was away I was rather interested and looked the matter up. I wondered if he'd go by air or rail."

"That settles that," said Scott decisively. "There's one bit of luck that's come our way. Superintendent Wharton is returning from Grenoble this morning and I'll arrange to hold him in Paris. If Mr. Franklin will take certain documents which I will hand over and cross by air from Croydon, he

can see Superintendent Wharton in Paris and go over everything with him there. I won't guarantee what action Wharton will take; that's entirely up to him; but I think the offer a fair one."

"A very generous one," said Sir Francis. "It would be highly indiscreet to publish anything about the new clue?"

"Most decidedly! Richleigh must not be alarmed under any circumstances."

"This is what I was thinking. As soon as Franklin wires me a key word that the arrest of Richleigh is an actual fact, then Durangos are at liberty to publish their version of the affair. It will be a generous one; I promise you that."

Scott made a wry face. "I hate to appear ungrateful, but until Richleigh is actually arrested, the public must know nothing. If anything gets out whereby he avoids arrest, even if it's in a year's time, your people will be held responsible. Afterwards you can publish what you like, subject to the laws of blasphemy and libel."

Sir Francis laughed. "Well, that's plain enough. By the way; you have every confidence in Wharton?"

Scott looked up sharply at that. "Every confidence," he replied reprovingly.

The reproof glanced off. Sir Francis gave the smile of a man who feels on remarkably good terms with himself and then took the other by the arm and led him out of the office.

(B)

Two days later Wharton and Franklin were in the train from Toulouse to Carcassonne and in those two days a good deal had happened. At the Sûreté where they had met, the scene had been an amusing one, what with Franklin's eagerness to discount his success and the other's perfect sportsmanship which recognised original work for what it was worth. It was rather like the traditional meeting of two ultra-courteous Frenchmen at a door.

As to the actual work done, it is the results that matter rather than the story. From the Sûreté an agent had been despatched to keep an eye on Richleigh. A real Simon Pure Frenchman should give no cause for alarm but in case of necessity he was to communicate *via* Carcassonne.

At the headquarters of the Aviation Company information was forthcoming that on the morning of the 12th of October there travelled to Toulouse a man who gave his name as Marinski. He had worn side whiskers, dark glasses and had had a muffler well round his neck. He spoke French with an English accent, a rather curious thing for one of that name since his appearance was not Jewish. The plane had arrived at 14.10 and after signing the acquittance book at the *guichet* M. Marinski had left with the other passengers. The reason why he had been noticed at all was that the police happened on that very date to be on the lookout for a defaulting cashier.

At Carcassonne Wharton presented his credentials. Thereupon the police at once began enquiries from garages and taxi drivers about a fare who, on

the afternoon of the 12th of October, had asked to be driven to Limoux or Couiza. The information was forthcoming in two days, and the driver's story was a damning one.

At about 16.30, on the arrival of the afternoon train from Toulouse, there had boarded his taxi a foreigner, who had merely uttered the words, "St. Hilaire!" But the driver had seen fit to bargain and had only started when he had got what he asked. Through the town of St. Hilaire however, the foreigner had stopped the taxi and said, "Couiza!" Once more there was bargaining and payment on the spot.

"Didn't you think," asked Wharton, "that he was a bandit who was after your taxi?"

Not by any means, the driver assured him. The man was old and almost toothless; he wore glasses, had a limp and was smaller than himself. At any rate they went on through Limoux and when within two kilometres of Couiza the foreigner stopped the taxi, got out and actually gave the driver a fifty franc tip. But when the driver had got only a hundred metres on the return journey he wondered what the man could possibly have got off there for, far from houses and in the middle of rocky gorges. Curiosity made him look back and as he did so he saw emerge from behind a rock another curious person with a knapsack on his shoulders. The light at the time was none too good.

"That settles it," said Franklin.

"About the most effective and ageing disguise I know of," said Wharton, "is the removal of false teeth. What were Richleigh's like?"

"Oh, he had false teeth all right. At least if he

hadn't, those he had in his mouth were the most regular set I've ever seen. What's the next move?"

"Limoux. Now we know what we want to find we might have some luck. If that girl Marcelle is there, you tackle her and I'll see madame."

When they got to the hotel everything seemed to be ready for them. Inside the door Marcelle sat at her desk knitting and regarding the entrants with solemn, black eyes. Wharton slipped through into the dining-room.

"You return already monsieur!" observed Marcelle.

"Yes mademoiselle. It is the elusive M. Richleigh who makes all this bother. How would you feel if you had a twin sister who resembled you so much that you were always being taken for each other?"

"I would like it very much," was the unexpected reply. "M. Richleigh has then a twin?"

"Figure to yourself the trouble it makes. You remember the M. Richleigh who slept here and spilled the coffee. That was one twin. Then a day or two later his brother came with the big monsieur who has just gone to see madame. Imagine how you were deceived. You thought it was the same M. Richleigh!"

"But the heel monsieur? The stains of the coffee?"

"Regard a little," said Franklin, limping across the room. "I have now a bad heel. If I change coats with Jérôme the waiter, that does not make me Jérôme."

"Monsieur makes fun of me."

"But the voice. What a difference there was!"

THE DECKS ARE CLEARED

"But all M. Richleigh said was. 'Une chambre,' so droll, just like that."

"But his teeth when he smiled?"

"Ah! the beautiful teeth! White as snow!"

"And he left, when?"

"Early in the morning I think."

"Well mademoiselle, it is indeed droll that you remarked no difference. You will laugh when you see the two together!"

"I shall laugh more, monsieur," said Marcelle slyly, "if I see three!"

Wharton's report was no better except that Richleigh had left just before 10.0 a.m.

"It looks as if Price had to lie doggo all day," said Franklin. "Some of his time he might have spent writing up the diary."

The information at the hotel at Couiza seemed to confirm that. Richleigh had arrived shortly before dinner and had gone at once to his room, apparently to attend to a sore heel.

"Did you ever have any suspicions of Richleigh?" asked Franklin as their car turned for the return journey. "Mind you, I don't see why you should."

"Well, I did and I didn't."

"The reason I asked was that you didn't seem particularly surprised when you heard my news."

"As you remarked, he was a likely suspect but you can't get away from an alibi. There was one thing however that made me think a good deal and that was the question of the paint brushes. He wrote to his brother Ernest to send him on two brushes he'd left behind. The letter set up a useful sort of alibi to start with. It shrieked out, 'You can't touch

me. I'm in France.' But the brushes were *new* ones."

"Meaning?"

"Well, are you attached to *new* brushes? Old and tried ones send for by all means. Carcassonne is an important sketching centre and he could have got some more there. Also he exaggerated their value somewhat. I just put him down as a liar and there was an end to it."

Wharton's plan of campaign as he sketched it, seemed to depend on the discovery of Price's body. He proposed to call in the aid of the authorities and hunt the area near the meeting place for disturbed soil and the ravines and crevices for the body or even clues.

"Won't that be a hopeless job?" said Franklin. "Look at those slopes and the undergrowth; places where nobody could go in search of a body."

"I'll import Swiss guides or Alpini," said Wharton determinedly.

"Yes; but why did Richleigh stay so long in Quillan? Because he wanted all the time he could get to conceal the body. Except for an occasional charcoal burner, nobody ever goes into that undergrowth."

"You're right," said Wharton. "But by God, that fellow had brains! It's funny in a way but everything we do piles on the certainty and yet we can get nothing definite. I'd like to hear any counsel who knew his job—Hartlett-French or any of the big guns—set about the case for the prosecution as it stands to date. He'd run amok."

Still, it was decided to begin the search in the faint hope that some clue might be brought to light.

THE DECKS ARE CLEARED

But at the police headquarters there was a further development. A telephone message from Boucher had come from Hyères.

Our friend intends in the very near future to take a journey. If you wish to do business it is imperative to see him at once.

"That tears it," said Wharton. "Possibly a world tour. It means watching him for one thing and that must give the game away sooner or later. Then he'll bolt."

Franklin had nothing to contribute beyond taking the optimistic view. "There's one thing about it," he said. "We may not be millionaires but we do see life!"

CHAPTER XXIII

THE NIGHT OF THE 21ST OF DECEMBER

(A)

WHARTON decided there was only one thing to do—to go at once to Hyères and hear Boucher's report. The police there were rung up with instructions to arrange for the agent to cross on the following day to La Tour Fondue, in time to meet the bus from the town. In the meanwhile the police at Carcassonne would continue the search for clues to the disappearance of Price.

"What I can't make out," said Wharton, "is how Richleigh knew this country so well. He told me he'd never had a holiday in France. I know guide books and contour maps might have told him a good deal but they don't explain how he was able to fix the exact spot to meet Price and how he knew where to have the interview and conceal the body."

"I think he'd been here before," said Franklin, "and to Hyères too. Take a schoolmaster's long summer holiday. If he's a secretive sort of bloke like Richleigh, nobody would want to know where he'd spent the whole of it. If anybody did ask he'd say, "Oh, just pottered round. Had a short cricket tour and then watched some matches in town." There was a good interval between the time when he broke up and his arrival in town to watch the cricket."

"I know; but that's the very point. One can't go to Richleigh and say, 'Give me an account of how you spent your time from last July to October.' He'd say, and he'd be entitled to say, 'What's the idea? Are you trying to accuse me of a murder I didn't commit? If not, why enquire into my private business? You go to hell.'"

Franklin agreed.

"The alibi is everything," Wharton went on. "While Richleigh can prove, as he most decidedly can at the moment, that he was at Limoux on the night of the murder, he can't be touched. The question of impersonation is fantastic; it won't bear discussion as far as a jury is concerned, though you and I know better. We can prove what we like and get what evidence we like but unless we can make the impersonation into a coherent and perfectly explicable thing, we're as far off as ever."

"The case for the Crown must be unassailable."

"Quite so. If he get's acquitted he can never be tried again, whatever the evidence that crops up."

The following afternoon when they descended from the bus at La Tour Fondue, the sea was running strongly and the white horses showed in the channel like the tails of frightened rabbits scurrying to their burrows at twilight. At the jetty the *Cormoran* bobbed up and down like a cork and Franklin hoped fervently that he would not have to make the crossing. In the inn corner, farthest from the door, sat Boucher, the placid image of a bourgeois in comfortable circumstances, from the black sombrero hat to the polish of the black boots. There were the usual polite flourishes, the gripping

of hands and the bowing to seats, and then over a bottle they got to work.

Boucher's story was this. He himself had come to the hotel as a native of Marseilles where it so happened he had a brother. A severe attack of influenza was supposed to have given him a bad time and by doctor's orders he was having a month's convalescence. In his room at the hotel he had a supply of patent medicines and his cough still troubled him.

He had had no conversation with Richleigh but had studiously avoided him. Twice however Richleigh had crossed to the mainland, and the first time Boucher had missed him. The second time he too had taken the trip. At the station at Hyères, knowing that there was no train for half an hour, he had arranged for the surveillance to be continued by a local agent, for fear that Richleigh should be disturbed. The journey had been a longer one than had been anticipated. Richleigh proceeded to Marseilles where his first visit was to the offices of a shipping company doing passenger traffic between that port and Algiers. Whether or not he had actually taken a ticket the agent had not been able to ascertain, as it was imperative for him to follow his man on the return journey. Since then however, Richleigh had announced his intention of leaving the hotel in a day or two.

"Why didn't *you* find out from Marseilles whether he had a ticket?" asked Wharton.

"What would you monsieur? You say I must look after M. Richleigh. Very well then. I go to Marseilles and while I am there he disappears. What would you say then to M. Boucher?"

Wharton acknowledged the force of the argument. The fault, if there were any, lay in the peculiar nature of the case itself. But if Richleigh did go to Algeria, the point was, could he be adequately watched?

"I say; I'm awfully sorry," said Franklin, "but I've just thought of something. Richleigh is a big bug on Arabic; at least that's what they told me at the school. If he gets to Algeria anything might happen."

"That puts a different complexion on things," said Wharton. "Something has got to be done, and done quick."

He looked extraordinarily serious and the other two watched him shake his head despondently. "I daren't move. There's simply nothing I can do on. Richleigh would laugh at me if I were to do so, as to tackle him with the information I've just got. And he'd be alarmed, and that would expect you to tell away when we didn't expect it. But it's now or nothing."

They watched his face and the expression merely crossed it. It was not for them to speak.

Wharton was the executive power; he alone represented authority. It was a case of all or nothing and it could not possibly be the all. The question was, what would Wharton decide to do?

"If we want to go to the island now, how can we do it?" he asked suddenly.

"Try a fisherman," suggested Boucher.

"Don't like it. The wind's in the east and we can't spend an hour or two tacking across the channel and back."

He called the patron over. "We are not monsieur. Here we sat, like three idle men for action. In

of old times, and let the *Cormoran* leave without us and now monsieur here wishes us to spend the night with him on the island. How are we to get there?"

The patron advised St. Giens. M. Fleurons of the hotel had a motor boat, not so big as the *Cormoran* but capable of holding four, and fairly fast. The way to St. Giens? Go back towards Hyères for a few hundred metres and then take the turn to the left.

The three set off. "All we're going to do," said Wharton, "is shift our headquarters to St. Giens. If we decide not to do anything we can always get back to Hyères."

Then suddenly as they were plodding along the rough: there Wharton made a remark. "This case me-iged for tlyou, John?"

local agent, for something in the tone as well as turbed. The j of the name, that made Franklin had been antic, something was in the wind. But his seilles where quickly. "Not more than to you shipping comj

that port and smiled. "Your mathematics are faulty. ally taken just fifteen hundred pounds difference." ascertain, i the fifteen hundred pounds! You're in man on tid what you say goes."

Richle, r another five minutes Wharton said nothing. the h, lin and Boucher made conversation which was

"W, intless as the last idle chatterings of friends whethave said good-bye and still wait for the mov-

"W, the train. Then Wharton made his decision. look and ave it as your opinion that Richleigh had Marseilles, ak. You prepared to gamble on that?" What would yon the chance that he's lacking in

balance. The man who wrote those letters must have a kink in him."

"And you'll absolutely leave everything to me and take what happens?"

"There'll be no squealing from me if anything goes wrong."

"Well, that's good hearing. The trouble is I can't tell you what I propose to do. If I did you might make me change my mind."

"About that fifteen hundred pounds," said Franklin. "Mr. Travers was entitled to the whole of it as I worked things out. He refused to touch a penny. All he asked was that if things went right, enough should be set aside to buy Price's widow and her mother some little business or another. He's enquiring into their means, or was when I left. There's only one thing I want to do sir, and that's to show my superiors they trusted the right man. If I let you down I should expect you to tell them so. That's all I've got to say. Now you carry on with the job and I'll ask no questions."

Wharton, undemonstrative as ever, merely nodded; then, "Now what about this boat?"

In a quarter of an hour they were aboard the *Hirondelle*, with the engineer perfectly unconcerned about the choppy sea. Franklin would have liked to hear an opinion as to the sea-worthiness of the boat but felt that the owner would not have risked his craft for so insignificant a sum as four hundred francs.

But the crossing was all that he feared. Boucher was ill before they reached the middle channel and he himself lasted little longer. Wharton was not enjoying it but he at least arrived fit for action. In

just under half an hour they entered the sheltered bay by the Plage d'Argent and with engine off, floated inshore. The light was failing rapidly and the sooner they were on the road the better. The two took a stiff dose from Wharton's flask and then, with Franklin leading, set off for the road to the village. The engine of the *Hirondelle* sounded behind them and then was lost.

In five minutes they were on the outskirts of the village and Boucher was sent to the hotel to reconnoitre. He returned with the information that Richleigh had just gone to his room and that he was probably leaving the island the next day. His final destination he had not announced.

"How many windows to the room?" asked Wharton.

"Two. About fifteen feet up; both facing north-east and both shuttered."

"Good!" said Wharton. "You wait under those windows, M. Boucher, and if a man drops out, have him as soon as he hits the ground. You know the bedroom all right, John?"

"If he hasn't changed it. The third from the front, isn't it, Boucher?"

"That's it."

"Right!" said Wharton. "Let's move on. John, you keep immediately behind me and whatever happens don't say a word. Glue your eyes on Richleigh's face as if you wanted to mesmerise him. Your face is as white as a sheet in any case. Try to scare him stiff. Stick your chin out and don't bat an eyelid. You ready Boucher? Then let's look for that yellow streak!"

(B)

There was a whispered conversation at the hotel entrance and then Franklin went quietly up the stairs. Wharton turned to the office in search of the manager. He was not there. Then a maid came in with an armful of clean table-cloths.

"Is M. Papini in?"

"No monsieur. He went out a few minutes ago. Would you like to see madame?"

"Oh no; it doesn't matter. I've come over specially to see a friend of mine—M. Richleigh—who is staying here."

"I'll go and find him," and she started off. But Wharton stopped her. "Don't disturb yourself mademoiselle. If you will be so good as to tell me his room I'll go and find him. I'll leave my bag here."

"No. 3 monsieur. At the top of the stairs and the second to the left."

Franklin was waiting on the landing and the two moved noiselessly along the corridor. Franklin could feel his heart racing like a mad thing and to him Wharton seemed as cool and unmoved as if he were going to his own room and not one which held a problem of known, and it might be insuperable difficulty. He wondered what Wharton would do and what would be his method of attack. At the best he could see nothing happening but a charge and Richleigh's sarcastic remarks and so stalemate. Then they stopped at the door. The elder man listened intently for a second or two, then rapped smartly with his knuckles. From inside a voice called cheerily, "Entrez!"

At a glance Wharton took in the room. On the right was the bed; in front two shuttered windows. Along the right wall, on each side of what looked like a chimney breast, was a recess; one with a washstand, the other curtained off as a wardrobe. To the left was a dressing-table with an open suitcase on the floor beside it. Almost in the middle of the room, with his back to the corridor so that the light fell on the book he was reading, was Richleigh in an easy chair. It looked as if he imagined the entrant was one of the maids for he went on reading unconcernedly. Then something unusual struck him. He turned his body in the chair and caught sight of the two visitors. You could almost hear the catch in his breath at the recognition. His face flushed. Then he went deathly white. Then he scrambled somehow to his feet and got a grip on himself. His speech was quick and nervous and his eyes fastened on Wharton's face.

"Yes? What is it you want?"

Wharton delayed his answer with what could only have been deliberate provocation. "Frank Richleigh, this is Detective-Inspector Franklin, late of Scotland Yard. I, as you know, am Superintendent Wharton. We are here as the result of the murder of your uncle."

Richleigh let his eyes rest for a moment on Franklin. There was a definite irony in the voice and the suspicion of a sneer in the pucker of the lips.

"The theatrical gentleman!"

Then he took out his cigarette case and with deliberation lighted a cigarette. "Do please sit down. I'm afraid there's only the bed. Which uncle did you want to see me about?"

Wharton held his ground. He did not even cast a glance at the bed. With shoulders hunched and eyes fixed exasperatingly on the other's face, he spoke as calmly as if he were remonstrating with a child.

"Why prevaricate, Richleigh? The time has gone for that sort of thing. We are here as the result of the part you played in the murder of your uncle, Thomas Richleigh, on the night of October the 11th of this year."

"I say; please don't be absurd. You know perfectly well where I was that night!"

"That is so. We know exactly where you were. I repeat; that's why we're here."

Richleigh flashed a look at the pair of them, then his eyes fell. With his forefinger he flicked to the stone floor the ash of his cigarette. "Well then, what is it you want to see me about?"

"What I've just told you. There is also another matter; the murder of Frederick Price!"

If anything could be seen beside the sudden stare, it was the stopping of his breath, the whirl of his thoughts while they collected themselves, the summoning of his nerves to cope with a mortal attack.

"The murder of *whom*?"

"Frederick Price; the man who resembled Gene Allen."

Richleigh turned his head and petulantly regarded the ceiling. "I'm afraid you're talking in riddles. You may know the answers but they're beyond me."

From his pocket Wharton took a sheet of paper. With eyes still on Richleigh's face he held it out. "Look at that letter and you may find the answer."

With a rare assumption of indifference Richleigh took it. Where he betrayed himself was in the sudden movement of his eyes along the lines; the speed with which he took a comprehensive survey of it. Then he read it through.

"This is nonsense as far as I'm concerned. What's it got to do with me?"

"We shall come to that," said Wharton quietly. He gave the explanation and he took his time. He gave the impression of having the rest of his life in which to make the case clear. His voice was judicial and unruffled.

"Now you see the answer. When you allowed Price to post that letter you made a mistake. He told you he was unmarried and he told you a lie. That letter was addressed to his wife and it tells one of his movements."

Richleigh put the end of the cigarette in the ash-tray on the dressing-table. Then he picked it up again and with it lighted another from his case. He decided to be annoyed.

"Perhaps it would save my time and yours if I repeat that as far as I'm concerned it's all nonsense. If you have nothing else to say, perhaps you'll leave my room."

"All in good time," replied Wharton imperturbably. "When we go we'll go together." Then his voice took on a new note. "Richleigh! Look at me! Look at me I say! Not only did Price send his wife those messages; he did something else. He kept a diary! Everything he did, from the day he lined up in that queue to his arrival at Limoux, is written in it. Richleigh, we know everything!"

Then his voice quietened and once more became

judicial. "Frank Charles Richleigh, I hold a warrant for your arrest on the charge of murdering your uncle, Thomas Taylor Richleigh, on the night of October 11th, of this year. I warn you that anything you say will be taken down as evidence against you."

For the first time Franklin's eyes shifted. He pulled out his notebook, unclipped his pen and then resumed his watching. On Richleigh's face could be seen many things. Imagine a man who thinks to pick a thorn from his foot and is suddenly struck by a rattlesnake. His anger would pass in a furious spasm, then would come fear and then panic. But the last was not yet. Though the cigarette was hardly begun, he took another from his case and lit it as before. His voice trembled slightly.

"Of course if you will persist in being so foolish, there's no more to say. But don't blame me."

He glanced down at the pullover he was wearing. "Do you mind if I get my coat?"

The question and the movement were simultaneous, both slow and very tired. With right hand he made as if to draw back the curtain. Then there was a whisk as it flashed back, a lightning movement of his body, the slamming of the door and—Richleigh was gone!

CHAPTER XXIV

THE NIGHT OF THE 21ST OF DECEMBER (*contd.*)

So quickly had the others moved that they were at the curtain as the key turned in the lock. What they saw was no wardrobe but a door which the curtain had concealed. Franklin tried the handle, then hurled his body at the panels. Before he realised that he was taking charge he was sprinting for the corridor. "Chambre communicante! You watch the door and the passage!"

But the fourth door was locked and it too held. He flew down the stairs to the deserted office and beneath the figure 4 found a key. Outside he collided with Papini who looked as if he had seen a ghost. Franklin scurried up the stairs and tried the key in the lock, while behind him came the voice and the pattering steps of Papini. The door opened and he switched on the light. On the right was a bare bedstead; in the centre an easel and chair and on the floor paintbox and papers. In the far left corner was an open window!

He leaned out and listened. A few feet down was the slope of the hill into which the hotel burrowed and beyond the light of the window were the trunks of the pines, like bars in an immensity of shadow. He ran again to the corridor where Wharton and Papini were talking with violent gesticulation. He caught the "Calmez-vous monsieur!" of Wharton as he dashed down the stairs.

THE NIGHT OF THE 21ST OF DECEMBER (*contd.*)

Beneath the windows of the bedroom Boucher was waiting.

"Have you seen him?" cried Franklin.

"What is it?" asked Boucher bewildered.

Franklin took his arm and hustled him to the corner. Then he kicked against the sharp slope and fell. Boucher regarded open-mouthed the lighted window and then stooped down to the narrow slit of light beneath their feet. "The kitchen!" he exclaimed.

Franklin took a glance too, then passed his hand over his forehead. It came away wet with perspiration. Since the time when Richleigh slipped through that door hardly a minute could have elapsed.

When they got back to the bedroom M. Papini was satisfied; at least he was listening quietly to Wharton's explanations.

"He's got clear away," said Franklin.

"You know the conditions better than I," said Wharton quickly. "What's the best thing to do?"

"Where shall I find the captain of the *Cormoran*?" asked Franklin.

"The first house on the corner," said Papini, throwing back the shutters. "Look, that light there!"

"I suggest sir that you remain here as a sort of headquarters. Boucher, you find the captain of the *Cormoran* and get him to put to sea at once and patrol the channel right along by the mainland. It'll be fairly quiet over there once he gets over. If you see Richleigh, hold him!"

"What I'll do," he added to Wharton, "is see Papillot and find if Richleigh returned the motor boat." Then he switched into Italian. "Signor

Papini; will you see the patron and tell him what's happened? We may want his authority to search the island and use the *Cormoran*."

Across the road at the restaurant, M. Papillot gave the news that he was unaware of Richleigh's impending departure. The latter had been out in the boat that morning. The two hurried down to the shore but there was no sign of the *Dorade*. On the jetty a fisherman was found who had been there for an hour, but he had seen nothing; no motor boat, according to him, had anchored that night.

Then Franklin thought of something. Why hadn't the boat been brought in? Had Boucher, for all his indifference, given Richleigh a suspicion? Hardly that. Nobody could have been more surprised than he at the entrance of the detectives. Then where *was* the *Dorade*? Probably out of action somewhere. If she had gone wrong, where was Richleigh likely to leave her? The Pirates' Cave or down by the Moorish Castle; that would be it.

"You will find at the hotel," he said to Papillot, "an Englishman who is with me in this affair. Explain please that I have gone to the Souterrain des Pirates and then on to the Château des Maures."

Franklin set off at a steady jogtrot. Endurance was what was wanted; not a speed that would not last beyond its first burst. The road he had gone over once before, but the reverse way and in the dark the going was treacherous. He saved himself for the downhill finish and then came the path to the cliffs, almost invisible in the undergrowth. From the summit he caught the lights of St. Giens

THE NIGHT OF THE 21ST OF DECEMBER (*contd.*)

and got his bearings. Far back could be heard the faint chug of the *Cormoran's* engine, though her light was not yet in sight.

From an overhanging pine he cut a slim branch and then ventured on. The crashing of the waves sounded almost beneath and a step from the path would mean disaster. Ten minutes later he saw the drooping pines against the skyline, got to his knees and felt for the rocky steps. Behind him the wind howled furiously and away to the east was the steady purr of the *Cormoran*.

The last steps to the beach, cut as they were in the solid rock and descending almost sheer, were dangerous to negotiate. The hand-holds were slippery with spray and dew and the way had to be felt for, step by step. Then at the very bottom with no sound of warning, something struck him. There seemed to be a dark shape and the flash of a light and afterwards he remembered the sound of a voice in that second's consciousness before he fell.

When he opened his eyes again he knew nothing but the dull ache in his head. Then he realised that his hands and feet were bound. But there was no gag in his mouth if that were any cause for thanks. In that small bay with its precipitous sides he might shout all night and to nothing but the echoes. Then with arching knees and levering of elbows he raised his head and slowly moved backwards. The first foot brought him to the steps and he let his body sink to the new found support.

At the same time he noticed the movement of a light, so subdued that at first he thought it was out at sea. Then he made out the white outline of a boat's hull and could discern the movement of a

man. It must have been a good half hour that he lay there; now hearing the faint tapping of metal on metal and then once or twice the first coughings of an engine that spluttered feebly and then died out. Once the figure splashed through the shallow water to the shadow of the rocks and then returned. Once the engine seemed to come to life and then it died down so suddenly that Franklin could hardly believe he had heard it.

The dark shape merged into the foreground and then seemed to be on top of him. Franklin closed his eyes until there was left the merest slit through which to peer. The figure came on. It stood above him. It stooped and a hand felt his heart. The game must have been given away, so furiously was it racing. Then he was rolled over on his back and the bonds felt which tied his wrists.

"You can open your eyes. I see you're all right."

Franklin said nothing. He wondered how much longer he would have to live. With eyes more accustomed to the darkness he could discern the figure of Richleigh and even the slit in the trousers of the dungarees he was wearing.

"What did you say your name was?"

"Franklin."

"You're a detective?"

"I am."

"It's not the best of trades. You put up rather a good show when you were here. How did you deceive Papini?"

"I didn't. I am Italian—on my mother's side."

"That's interesting. Will you give me your word not to holler if I don't knock you out again?"

"I shan't holler," said Franklin. "If I did nobody

could hear me. And I don't feel like hollering at the moment."

"Sensible fellow! I'll have that engine going in a minute. You lie here and be thankful."

The figure merged into the darkness of the tiny bay. There was once again the sound of water splashing and the tapping on metal. Franklin's head felt as if it must burst. Everything seemed unreal, uncanny, unstable as a nightmare. There was the chill of the air, the dark, the unaccustomed spot and that tip-tapping not seventy yards away. How long he lay there before Richleigh came again, he could not judge; it might have been ten minutes or even half an hour. Only rarely the engine spluttered. Then came the splashing of water, the figure approaching, and the voice.

"I think she'll go now in a minute or two. How're you feeling?"

"Pretty fair," said Franklin. "Would you mind loosening my legs? I give you my word I won't stir."

Richleigh fumbled in his pocket and found a knife; felt for the bonds round the ankles and cut them. "I don't think you'll get far. How did you and Wharton tumble to that business of Price? His wife send you the diary?"

"Just luck," said Franklin. "Ludovic Travers saw——"

"Ludovic Travers? You mean the man who wrote the *Economics of a Spendthrift*? How did he come in?"

"He watched the queue line up for that Gene Allen advertisement of yours and wondered what it was all about. Then we found out that one of

your colleagues had nicknamed you Gene Allen."

"Jenston! My God! That poisonous little swine! The filthy bastard never even washed his neck! Christ, if I'd got him here!" Franklin watched him as he looked up at the sky and raised his hands as if to strike a blow.

"Well, it's my own damn fault." He moved off towards the boat, then stopped and looked back. "Don't be such a fool as to move. I've got eyes like a cat."

"I shan't move," said Franklin.

Once again the quiet and the dark. Down in the sheltered bay was once more the tapping on metal. Out beyond, the seas crashed and above them the wind whined in the trees. He was feeling better in spite of the dull ache in his head. He wondered what Richleigh would do; whether he would leave him there and would it be alive. Then for the first time the engine sounded true. It roared three or four times and was shut off. Once more Richleigh came over. Franklin watched him as he buttoned the collar of the dungaree coat round his neck.

"She's all right now. Think I'll push off."

"Richleigh; you're not going to be such a fool? Go out there in that! It's suicide!"

Richleigh was outwardly indifferent. "I don't know; I've seen worse. Wonder where you and I'll be this time to-morrow?"

Franklin watched and said nothing.

"I've got a pretty long trip to do. Guess where?"

"Algiers."

Richleigh looked at him queerly. "I'd be pretty much of a damn fool to try that. A few hundred

miles of open sea! Well, cheerio; I've no particular grudge against you but you can thank God your name's not Jenston."

Franklin made a sudden resolution. "I don't know where I shall be to-morrow—probably down with pneumonia—but I know where you'll be if you go out in that boat. Will you tell me one thing before you go? It's his wife I'm thinking about. What happened to Price?"

Richleigh waited for some seconds before he spoke and then in his voice there seemed to be an enormous regret. "I dropped a rock on his head. It was a filthy thing to do. I daren't look when I did it; I just heard it fall."

Neither spoke for a good few moments.

"He was a good chap in many ways. There'll be some money of mine at the hotel; send it to his missis. There's no need to let her know where it came from."

He felt once more the collar of the coat.

"There's something else you might like to know. I went to a specialist in town—two as a matter of fact. Heart a bit wonky. They gave me a couple of years, perhaps three; with the last one on my back. Looks now as if it might be less."

He turned his back abruptly and before the other could put into words the questions he had half formed, was almost lost in the shadows beneath the cliff. Franklin struggled to his feet, steadied himself against the steps and then lurched forward.

"Come back Richleigh! Don't be a damn fool!"

At the boat Richleigh turned to meet him.

"Get back, or by God I'll make you!"

Franklin still came on. Then the other met him.

Without warning, his right hand thudded on Franklin's mouth. As he fell he struck again and again. Franklin sank to his knees. The blood from his nose tasted salt and that was the last thing he knew. When he came round, there was no sign of Richleigh or the boat. Out at sea there came no sound of an engine; nothing but the dash of waves on the rocks and the lapping of water in the tiny bay. His head was throbbing and his face felt a mass of bruises. On his knees he shuffled to the shelter of the steps and tried to cut the wrist bonds against the rock. But his hands were too cold to control even that movement.

Half an hour later Wharton and Papillot found him there. Both had been alarmed at his absence and but for the violence of the sea would have nosed their way along the coast with a boat. As it was they had stopped first at the castle as handier to the road and that had meant delay. Two fishermen accompanied them and with their help they got Franklin to the top of the steps. The stiff dose of brandy seemed to him to run to his feet like liquid fire.

"How is it now?" asked Wharton. "Feeling better?"

"I'm all right. What did Richleigh hit me with?"

"A spanner. Do you feel like telling what happened?"

Franklin took his time over the story, then he too wanted news. Had Richleigh been seen?

"Both M. Papillot and I thought we heard a boat's engine as we started out, then we lost it again. He'd never live in that sea."

"It was thundering good of you and Papillot; I might have got pneumonia, if nothing else."

"Feel like starting?"

"I think so. I don't know. I'm not so strong as I thought now I get on my pins."

The fishermen lent a hand and by easy stages they made their way to the hotel. Franklin was got to bed with a scalding basin of soup, heavily laced with brandy, as a tonic. M. Papini and the patron's steward marched off with a hundred or so of men to take up stations along the north shore. Out at sea the lights of the *Cormoran* could still be discerned. Up in Richleigh's room Wharton resumed the examination of his belongings. In the bar of the deserted restaurant M. Papillot set about preparing his bill for the value of the *Dorade* and its effects, against the possible departure of the big Englishman, who was said moreover, to represent his government. One never knew and there was no harm in being prepared.

CHAPTER XXV

MOSTLY FOOLS

WHEN Franklin woke at dawn Wharton was sitting in the easy chair drawn up at the bedside. His head was sunk on his chest and he was breathing heavily. A flood of affection came over Franklin as he looked at the tired face. What a man to work with! Never a thought of personal advantage, no begrudging of another's success but just one who saw his duty and did it.

His own head felt like splitting as he raised it on the pillow. He felt the plaster and the shaven circle and winced as he thought what might have happened if the edge of that spanner had caught him. Then Wharton opened his eyes, yawned and stretched himself.

"Well, John; how're you feeling?"

"Pretty fair considering. A cup of coffee and I'll be all right. You were a good friend to me last night, sir."

"Drop the sir and don't thank me for nothing. You'd have done more than that for me."

Franklin shook his head, then, "Is there any news?"

"The *Dorade* came ashore just after midnight, but no sign of Richleigh. Of course he might have put the boat out to sea and then made for the woods. But that'd be pretty suicidal. He'd be bound

to be taken sooner or later. Now I'll see about that coffee while you're dressing. Sure you can manage?"

When he returned, Franklin was feeling more or less himself. Just a bit tottery on the legs perhaps, but as he told Wharton, the virtual ending of that case was the best tonic for a man with a cut skull and a bruiser's face.

"That reminds me," said the other and he pulled out of his pocket a sheaf of papers. "What do you think of these?"

The sheets were closely woven parchment and each was covered with line after line of writing. The phrases were repeated, sometimes a dozen times each. Occasionally they were combined and lastly came a certain coherence.

Dear Sir. You are now about to see.

Let not him that putteth on his armour.

Sirius the dogstar.

Marry, but I shall speak.

He is the mysterious twenty first.

Ring down the curtain!

The writing was of the kind known as copperplate, the up-strokes delicate as if made with a tracing nib, the down ones firm and balanced. The letters stood as cold and formal as if on parade.

"He might plead all sorts of things," said Franklin, "but if he's caught this will help to hang him as sure as his name's Richleigh. Where did you find them?"

"In the breast pocket of the coat he was wearing the moment before we came into the room. You see how cautious he was, even to himself. Without

his typewriter he decided to compose the final 'Marius' letter and make a spectacular bow. He had to adopt and practice a colourless style of handwriting. We can see just what he was going to say and yet he wouldn't trust himself to say it on paper. The word 'Marius' he fought particularly shy of. And yet who would have had the least suspicion of that letter, especially a foreigner?"

"His virtual confession to me would have been no good," said Franklin. "It would have been my word against his and I should have been held prejudiced. You know that business I was telling you about last night; Richleigh's going to the specialists who gave him two or three years to live on account of his heart. I wonder if it's true?"

"Did he seem serious?"

"He spoke like a man who was going out in that sea with his eyes open. What I wondered was, if he had that little time to last, why he didn't finish at that school with a stiff upper lip?"

"Perhaps his idea was, better three years of some thousands a year than be without it and still have the drudgery. My idea is that he killed two birds with the one stone. He made his last years affluent and at the same time assured something for his brothers, as well as getting that woman Cardon out of the family."

"He was an amazing chap," said Franklin.

"He was all that. Do you know when I knew last night that we had him?"

"No."

"When he first pulled out his cigarette case. A man who's smoking with nothing on his conscience would have handed it round. Richleigh wasn't

smoking among friends; he was using it as a cover to steady his thoughts."

Through the glass of the verandah they surveyed the sea. The wind had dropped but the waves would not be calm again for many hours.

"The *Cormoran's* back then?"

"Yes. She put in about midnight. The skipper knew no ordinary boat could live out there so I don't blame him."

"I shall have to go over then this morning. You don't think I'm running away and leaving you in the lurch?"

"Heavens no! I shall have to wait a reasonable time to see if Richleigh's body turns up and if not, keep the coast patrolled. But your job's done in any case. I don't like your going over alone and I've got to cross to report from Hyères."

As they stepped on the jetty at La Tour Fondue Wharton spoke to the captain. Then the conductor of the bus was approached and the three of them entered the inn.

"M. le Capitaine here has seen my authority to open the bag," said Wharton. "You can all act as witnesses."

In it was a registered letter for Richleigh. Wharton exhibited the address and then opened it. It contained four fifty pound notes and a brief letter from Ernest Richleigh acknowledging the receipt of some sketches and sending love from his wife and daughter.

"That's what he was waiting for," said Wharton. "I'll bet five pounds he didn't take a ticket at Marseilles."

There was a new drawing up of receipts and the

THE PERFECT MURDER CASE

bag was sealed. An hour later Franklin was in the train for Toulon. All that he had wired to Durango House were the words—

Commencement. Arriving six to-morrow.
Franklin.

He got no news till he reached Dover, where the splash bills shrieked at him from the bookstall.

PERFECT MURDER CASE SOLVED

BRILLIANT WORK BY DURANGO
DETECTIVE

SCOTLAND YARD IN AT THE DEATH.

He got all the available London dailies and all told the same story. The pictures alone on the back pages were different. That story had evidently been issued from Durango House. It began with the "Marius" letter and the crime, traced the lines upon which Franklin had worked and ended with the promise of the presentation of the case against Frank Richleigh; the kind of presentation which might be made by eminent counsel who had for his material strange coincidences. It paid incidentally a tribute to the vast and ramificatory industry of Scotland Yard and hinted at a surprise which the Yard could never have anticipated. The story was to be complete in two further instalments. Here and there Franklin thought he could discern the hand

of Ludovic Travers. Two other items were of interest. The *Record* had its headlines—

THE *RECORD* PAYS ITS £500 REWARD.

and the *Wire* printed a facsimile of its £1,000 cheque.

He treated himself to a tea basket and then lay back in his corner, listening to the conversation of the carriage. But all the time there kept coming to his mind the death of Price; the two descending a crevasse, Price below, the sudden dropping of that rock and Richleigh's averted head. He recalled too that day when he and Richleigh had made the descent to the cave and wondered what thoughts had gone through his mind as they slowly moved down the steep steps. No wonder Richleigh had gone first!

On the platform Sir Francis and Travers were waiting, the former with a thrust-out hand and a "Well done Franklin!" and the latter with a smile and a nod. As they went towards the entrance the sight of the bookstall reminded Travers of something.

"Have you seen the latest?"

"I've heard nothing since I left Porquerolles."

Travers handed over his evening paper and in the car Franklin read it.

RICHLEIGH'S BODY FOUND

FURTHER EVIDENCE OF GUILT

The body of Frank Richleigh came ashore this

THE PERFECT MURDER CASE

morning on the north side of the island of Porquerolles. It was terribly battered by the waves. It appears that the previous night, after a murderous attack on ex-Detective-Inspector Franklin who had followed him, the murderer attempted to escape by motor boat but was cap-sized in a heavy sea. The boat itself had been washed ashore some hours before the body was found. Superintendent Wharton of Scotland Yard, who has been in charge of the case, was present and it is understood that in the pockets of the dead man was found certain evidence that connects him definitely with the crime, irrespective of the evidence of his flight.

"A wonderful character, Wharton," said Franklin. "I probably shouldn't be here now but for him."

"You seem to have had a pretty thin time," said Sir Francis.

"It might have been worse. Richleigh could have committed a third murder if he had been so minded."

"You're sure you're feeling perfectly fit again?"

"Oh rather. A bit sore about the head perhaps but nothing worth noticing."

"One must pay for romance," said Travers.

"Romance! There's not much romance in being hit over the head with a spanner!"

"Oh, I don't know! Romance, like everything else, is relative. To Balham, even Tooting may be romantic."

The limousine pulled up with a jerk on the heels of a bus and for nearly five minutes they waited in

MOSTLY FOOLS

a traffic jam. Sir Francis, growing impatient, leaned from the window, and then caught sight of the lights that ran across the great stretch of the Utopia Insurance Company's new building. He drew the attention of the others.

First came a flash of scarlet and a staring

IF

then a twinkle of yellow, the full width of the tremendous building—

ANY FOOL CAN GIVE ADVICE

There followed another flash of scarlet, and by itself beneath, the one word

THEN

Franklin, who had heard of, but not seen, this monster advertisement, wondered what was coming next, and a final blaze of yellow told him.

DURANGOS ARE THE BIGGEST FOOLS IN THE WORLD

Why Travers should think of such extraordinary things as magic and moonlight would be hard to say, but think of them he did. Perhaps too, as he recalled those perplexed souls in the midnight wood near Athens, he saw in his mind the battered body of Richleigh, wave-soaked and icy cold, and remembered the boasts of the man who had set out

THE PERFECT MURDER CASE

to achieve a thing which should be perfect. He did not mean to speak and yet the thought escaped in words before he was aware.

"Lord, what fools these mortals be!"

Sir Francis smiled quietly and glanced at both of them. Perhaps in his mind was the thought of Scotland Yard and the big battalions, but in his comment too, was the charity of one who embraced in the generous scope of his gestures all mankind; fools and wise and maybe the knaves.

"Well, God give them wisdom that have it and those that are fools, let them use their talents."

The block lifted and the car moved on. Franklin sat thinking of two women in the tiny sitting-room of a country cottage. All around was the noise of traffic, the roar of the streets, the blare of horns. Now and again could be heard from the pavement the cry of the newspaper sellers—

PERFECT MURDER CASE!

LATEST NEWS!

THE END

Acc. No.	9346
Class No.	F.2.
Book No.	85

